The Drive to Borgen Bay

Several major counterattacks were mounted by the Japanese in the course of the battle for control of western New Britain. In one, the *2d Battalion, 53d Infantry* was pared to skeleton strength by the concentrated grenade, small-arms, mortar, and artillery fire laid down by Combat Team C. In another, the STONEFACE Group crushed elements of *1/53* assaulting the Tauali perimeter. A third attack, carefully but poorly planned by the *141st Infantry* commander, Colonel Katayama, was aimed at the most prominent objective within the Yellow Beach defenses—Target Hill. The time chosen for the attempt was the early morning hours of 3 January. (See Map 26.)

Like its predecessors, the new enemy thrust had little chance of success. Although the Japanese were powerfully outnumbered and outgunned at all times, they had the opportunity to concentrate their forces and counterattack in signficant strength. Why they failed to mass their resources remains a puzzle. The Target Hill assault force continued to fit the pattern of being too small to achieve results worth the cost of the effort.

For the first few days of the BACKHANDER operation, enemy intelligence officers at Matsuda's headquarters seriously underestimated the size of the Allied landing force, a fact which may account for the limited number of troops committed against Frisbie's and Masters' positions. There appears to be little reason to believe, however, that Colonel Katayama was ignorant of the real strength of the BACKHANDER Force when he selected a reinforced rifle company as the spearhead of his Target Hill assault. Any lingering doubts that he may have held regarding Allied strength must have been dispelled on 2 January when General Shepherd launched an attack to drive the Japanese back from the Marine lines.

ATTACK AND COUNTERATTACK[1]

New Year's Day had been a period of restless waiting for General Shepherd's command as preparations were made to attack the enemy troops dug in facing the Marine beachhead. The ADC's scheme of maneuver called for 3/7 to pivot on its left, where its position joined the 2d Battalion's foxholes, and to advance southeast across 2/7's front. The newly arrived 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was to move farther inland, tie into 3/7's right flank, and extend the assault frontage to 1,000 yards, far enouth south to overlap any Japanese defenses. "With 2/7 providing a base of fire to contain the enemy

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase III, Extension of Beachhead Perimeter and Capture of Hill 660; *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—1;* Col John E. Weber ltr to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 27Mar52; LtCol Marshall W. Moore ltr to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 27Apr52; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

to their front, it was envisioned that the enveloping force would roll up the Japanese left flank." [2]

On the morning of 2 January, the movement to jump-off positions was laborious and time-consuming. Supporting fires by the 1st and 4th Battalions of the 11th Marines were concentrated in the area facing 2/7's lines; both artillery units fired through 1/11's fire direction center to simplify control and coordination.[3] At 1000, leading elements of the two assault battalions crossed the line of departure. The experience of the average Marine rifleman in this situation was vividly described by one of the 1st Division's scout officers:

> You'd step off from your line in the morning, take say ten paces, and turn around to guide on your buddy. And—nobody there, Jap or Marine. Ah, I can tell you it was a very small war and a very lonely business.[4]

For 300 yards, the two assault companies of Lieutenant Colonel Williams' battalion hacked and dodged their way through the jungle, trying to keep contact and watching warily for the first sign of the Japanese ahead. As they approached the banks of a little stream that cut through 2/7's line and extended on a north-south axis across the zone of advance, enemy small-arms fire sprayed the front. The Marines of 3/7 dived for cover, returned the fire as best they could against unseen targets, and began to inch their way forward.

On the right of the developing battle, 3/5 had to cut its way through dense fields of kunai grass during most of the morning's advance. Patrols ranging south from the open flank found no evidence of enemy troops on the rising mountain slopes. As Lieutenant Colonel McDougal's battalion left the grassy area and moved into the jungle toward the sound of the firing, its lead platoons also encountered the Japanese defenses. By midafternoon, the Marines had formed a line along the west bank of the stream, already called Suicide Creek, which bordered the enemy position. What lay ahead was a nightmare for the attacking infantrymen.

The Japanese had dug foxholes and bunkers under the arching roots of the forest giants and amidst the thick intervening brush, camouflaging the whole position so that no trace of it was revealed. Interlocking fire lanes gave enemy gunners enough of a view of ground to their front and flanks to provide targets and yet were almost impossible to detect. The few yards of open area over the stream bed was a killing ground without any concealment for the attackers. Most of the Marines' supporting artillery and mortar fire burst in the canopy of leaves and branches far overhead and had little effect on the hidden and protected enemy below.

Suicide Creek was aptly named, and, for the night of 2–3 January, the Marines dug in at approximately the same positions they had held when the Japanese first opened fire. All attempts to rush the enemy had failed; the volume of defending fire was so heavy that most of the assault troops spent the afternoon pinned to the ground. The man who rose to advance inevitably became a casualty.

Manning the Suicide Creek defenses were the survivors of the *2d Battalion, 53d Infantry* and its attached units. Major Takabe's badly shot-up command, lying in wait for the advancing Marines, could

[2] *Shepherd ltr.*
[3] Luckey, "Cannon, Mud, and Japs," pp. 52–53.
[4] Quoted in McMillan, *The Old Breed*, p. 192.

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now extract grim payment for the punishment it had received in a week of futile attacks of Combat Team C's perimeter. Takabe's part in the planned counterattack on Target Hill was to create a diversion by an assault on 2/7's lines, a tactic that failed miserably in the face of the Marine battalion's practiced defensive measures.

Equally unsuccessful was the main event. The *5th Company* of *2/141*, supported by the direct fire of 20mm cannon and machine guns firing from positions in the jungle at the base of the hill and of 75mm guns emplaced near Hill 660, was to seize the crest of the hill. The unit defending, 3d Platoon, Company A, 1/7, was ready when the assault came. Long before the Japanese actually started up the lower slopes, the Marines on the narrow nose of the hill above the point of attack could hear the enemy soldiers cutting steps into the steep base of the hill which was hidden in the jungle growth. The 1st Battalion's mortars, in position back of the height, could not bear on the Japanese as they were actually as close as 20 yards to the Marines above them. The Japanese mortars and grenade dischargers were not hampered by the same limitation, and enemy shells landed all over the hill during the night to cover the attack preparations.

Toward dawn, the enemy soldiers rose out of the trenches they had dug to protect themselves from Marine fire and attempted to storm a machine gun position on the naked nose of ground. Although a Japanese mortar shell killed two men at the gun, the sole survivor of the crew stayed on and kept firing, cutting down the Japanese as they climbed into his line of sight. The rest of the Marine platoon, with the support of men from the various observation posts located on the hill's crest, used small arms and grenades to beat back every attempt of the enemy to gain the hill's upper slopes. By daylight, although the Japanese were still firing on the hill, the counterattack proper had petered out. When it was safe to move about in the open later on during the morning of the 3d, patrols were sent out to probe the area from which the attack was launched. Forty bodies were found, many of them piled in heaps in the trenches at the hill's foot; the absence of any wounded was evidence that cost of the fruitless attack was greater. The Japanese themselves counted the casualties at Target Hill as 46 killed, 54 wounded, and 2 missing in action.[5]

The prize of the night's action was the documents taken from the body of the Japanese company commander who fell attacking the Marine machine gun position. The papers helped the ADC's Intelligence Section fill in gaps in the order of battle and gave them a pretty clear picture of the movements of the troops opposing them. A fragmentary order signed by this officer, and picked up from the body of one of his platoon leaders on 4 January, gave the Marines their first inkling of the existence of Aogiri Ridge, a formidable defensive position that guarded the trail over which most of the Japanese were reaching the battle area. An accompanying rough sketch with this order gave the approximate location of both ridge and trail, but the ADC observation post on Target Hill could not pinpoint either in the maze of jungle ahead of the Marine lines.

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[5] AET 2026, ATIS AdvEch No. 2, dtd 18Feb44, MatsudaFor MedSect Casualty Repts, 26Dec43–20Jan44 in *ADC IntelDocuments*.

Before Aogiri Ridge became a pressing problem, however, the Japanese had to be driven back from Suicide Creek. The repulse of the counterattack on Target Hill evidently had no effect on the defenders of the enemy position east of the creek, and the volume of fire stemming from the hidden bunkers showed no sign of let-up when the American assault was renewed on 3 January. During the morning, Marines of 3/7 were able to get across the creek to the flanks of the main Japanese defenses and 3/5 closed in similar manner from the southwest, but neither battalion could exploit its advantage. The attack stumbled to a halt in the face of determined opposition. Some weapon heavier than a rifle or a machine gun was needed in the forefront of the attack, preferably tanks, if they could be gotten to the front.

The engineers of Company C, 1/17, were equal to the challenge of getting the armor forward, and, in a day of incredibly hard labor, built a corduroy road across the coastal swamp to the kunai fields. Late in the afternoon of the 3d, three medium tanks of a platoon that had been dispatched from the airdrome crashed through the brush and trees to a point opposite the center of Japanese resistance. Before the Shermans could attack, however, the engineers had to cut a passage through 12-foot high banks to enable the tanks to cross the sluggish stream. The Japanese shot two drivers out of the seat of an unarmored bulldozer that came up to dig its blade into the bank and shove the dirt down into the water. A third engineer volunteer was able to operate the machine, crouching in its shelter and moving the controls with a shovel and axe handle. By nightfall, the way was clear for a tank-led attack.

On the morning of the 4th, after artillery had fired a preparation, the first medium eased its way down the earthen ramp, churned through the shallow water, and nosed up the far bank right into the heart of the enemy position. Covering Marine riflemen cut down two Japanese who attempted to lay explosives against the tank, and the rest of the battle was almost easy. Like grim executioners, the tank-infantry teams expertly destroyed the dug-in defenses with point-blank cannon fire, the crushing action of weighty treads, and the reaper-like spray of bullets from small arms which caught the few Japanese who escaped burial in their emplacements.

After pausing to reorganize, the two assault battalions swept forward nearly a thousand yards to seize an objective line in the jungle that would serve as a line of departure for the next phase of General Shepherd's attack. Japanese opposition was negligible during the day's advance, after the reduction of the Suicide Creek defenses. The forward movement of 3/7 masked 2/7's old position, and, on order from Colonel Frisbie, the 2d Battalion advanced across the trace of the attacking Marines to reach the right flank and tie in with 3/5. As Lieutenant Colonel Conoley's unit moved through the web of defenses that had been dug in facing the beachhead perimeter and the creek, 115 enemy dead were counted.

The total of estimated Japanese casualties inflicted by all of Combat Team C's units during the fighting at Target Hill and Suicide Creek was close to 500 killed and wounded. In light of the information contained in captured reports, that figure was probably not far above the actual losses. By 5 January, the two major enemy infantry units involved in the fight-

MAP 26

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ing, *2/53* and *2/141*, were down from strengths of about 500 men each to 147 and 324, respectively.[6] The losses of attached units for this period are not known, but were logically on a comparable scale. The *53d's 2d Battalion* had been badly chewed up by 2/7 in the first few days after the landing, and Suicide Creek left its companies with an average strength of 22. Except for the losses of its *5th Company* at Target Hill, the *141st Infantry* was still pretty much intact.

The Marines lost comparatively few men on 4 January when they advanced with the support of tanks, but their casualties in the previous two days of fighting were heavy. The combined losses reported by the 7th Marines and 3/5 were 36 men killed, 218 wounded, and 5 missing in action.[7] The cost promised to be just as great in future days' actions whenever the Japanese chose to hold prepared defenses in the jungle. Characteristically, the enemy showed no lack of a will to fight, even in a hopeless cause.

Captured diaries and letters of Japanese soldiers who fought at Cape Gloucester show that most of them knew they were cut off from effective support by the remainder of New Britain's garrison. Nightly raids by a few Rabaul-based planes which occurred for the first few weeks after D-Day seem to have given little lift to enemy morale. In fact, since antiaircraft fire kept the pilots flying high and erratically, their bombs fell as often within the Japanese lines as they did inside the American. Several Marines were killed and about 30 were wounded by bomb fragments when they were caught in the random pattern of hits.

The support the *Matsuda Force* needed was not nuisance raids by a few scattered bombers, but a steady influx of men, rations, guns, and ammunition. The few Japanese barges that attempted to sneak into the eastern end of Borgen Bay to land supplies were sunk by Marine artillery. On the southern coast, Allied attack planes and torpedo boats kept the barge route permanently closed. The pittance of supplies brought forward along the north coast trail by Japanese and native carriers was not enough to sustain the troops opposing the 1st Marine Division. The average enemy soldier fought with his stomach gnawingly empty, his clothes and shoes sodden and rotting away, and his body attacked by jungle diseases. Despite the circumstances, discipline and national pride made the Japanese capable of an impassioned defense. There were no cheap victories to be had at Cape Gloucester.

AOGIRI RIDGE[8]

The Marines of General Shepherd's command spent 5 January preparing to attack, replenishing ammunition, and replacing essential items of equipment lost in the Suicide Creek fighting. During the day, the interior flanking companies of 1/7 and 3/5 closed toward each other and pinched out the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, taking over its positions. As the 1st Bat-

[6] AET 2026, ATIS AdvEch No. 2, dtd 18Feb44, MatsudaDet StfTele A No. 270 to CofS, 17th Div, dtd 7Jan44, in *ADC IntelDocuments*.

[7] 7th Mar R–1 Jnl, 27Oct43–26Mar44, entries of 2–4Jan44.

[8] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase III. Extension of Beachhead Perimeter and Capture of Hill 660; *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I; ADC IntelDocuments;* Col Lewis W. Walt comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Compaign*, dtd 4Mar52; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*.

talion shifted to the right, Weapons Company of the 7th moved into line along the coastal road and reported to Lieutenant Colonel Weber for orders. On the opposite flank, 2/7 with Battery D, 1st Special Weapons Battalion attached, conformed to the movement of 3/5 and traced a curve through the jungle and kunai patches to face south and east. The ADC's infantry reserve was 3/7, temporarily commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Puller.[9] (See Map 27.)

The principal objectives of the 6 January attack were a small hill, Hill 150, due south of Target Hill in 1/7's zone, and the mysterious Aogiri Ridge, which might be in either 2/7's or 3/5's path. Since the jungle ahead of the Marines showed no prominent rise between Hills 150 and 660 along the coast and the mountain slopes inland, the consensus was that Aogiri would be found in a southwesterly direction toward the mountains. This guess, although logical, was inaccurate. Aogiri Ridge proved to be only a thousand yards west of Hill 150 and dead ahead of 3/5. A meandering, nameless stream which crossed the whole front of 1/7 coursed through the low ground between the two Marine objectives.

Colonel Katayama, commanding the Japanese troops directly opposing the advance, numbered his remaining combat effectives at 1,320 men. About 550 soldiers, most of them members of the *2d Battalion, 141st Infantry* or survivors of *2/53*, held a line of defenses that protected the trail to Nakarop. Dug in on Aogiri Ridge itself were the men and machine guns of one company of the *39th Field Antiaircraft Battalion*. In reserve, Katayama held another 520 men, including regimental headquarters and heavy weapons units and the weak companies of the uncommitted *3d Battalion* of the *141st*. Hill 660 was defended by antiaircraft units reinforced with rifle sections from the *6th Company* of *2/141*.

All through the 5th, Marine artillery fired on possible concentration points and suspected defensive positions in the area ahead of the American lines. In very few cases could the results of preparatory fire be observed; if shells did not burst in the tree tops, they exploded out of sight below, amidst the brush. The men manning the vantage points on Target Hill and observers in planes overhead were seldom able to do more than determine that the right area had been hit.

On 2 January, the 1st Division's own light aircraft, which had been intended for use in spotting artillery fire, began operating from a strip on Airfield No. 1. The makeshift air-ground radios with which the planes were fitted proved to be next to useless; the unit commander declared that the radios "petered out as soon as you got them more than two or three miles [from base]."[10] As a result, the airborne spotters either reported what they had seen on landing or dropped a message to the nearest artillery battalion. Fire control from the air proved to be an impossibility with the communications equipment available.

The planes of the Fifth Air Force that flew strikes in support of the attacking Marines had even greater difficulty than the artillery spotters in locating targets.

[9] The regimental executive officer took over the battalion on 4 January when Colonel Frisbie relieved its commanding officer. Puller held temporary command until 9 January when Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Buse, Jr. took over 3/7.

[10] Maj Theodore A. Petras interview by HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 11Apr50, p. 3.

From a fast-flying plane directly overhead, the jungle in the Borgen Bay region had the appearance of an undulating sea of green with few prominent landmarks to guide strafing and bombing runs. Most air attacks were directed at objectives designated by map coordinates, but occasionally high explosive and smoke shells were used to pinpoint targets for pilots.[11] The BACKHANDER Force's requirement, that most bombing take place at least 500 yards from the nearest friendly troops,[12] usually limited air support to destruction and interdiction missions aimed at points well back of the Japanese defenses immediately facing the Marines. On 6 January, before the assault companies advanced, two squadrons of B–25s hit smoke-marked targets that included possible reserve assembly areas, routes of approach to the front, and what was hoped to be the particular stretch of jungle that hid Aogiri Ridge.

The Marines opened the next phase of their attack with a general advance that began at 1100 on the 6th, following a 15-minute preparation fired on Hill 150. On the left flank, Company A of 1/7 waded across the stream at the foot of Target Hill and advanced until it was stopped by heavy small-arms fire crackling from a road block on the coastal trail. Patrols had discovered the block on the previous day, and tanks were moving close behind the assault infantry to take care of it. When the lead tanks, fearing that they would bog down in its muddy bottom, hesitated at the banks of the stream, a Weapons Company half track splashed ahead through the water and showed the way. The Shermans followed and their 75mm guns made short work of the enemy positions.

Freed by the armor's fire, the troops on the left of 1/7 continued to advance across ground that became increasingly swampy. In the afternoon, Company A seized a trail junction at the coastal track; the path leading inland appeared on no Allied maps. The troops moving in the center of the 1st Battalion's attacking line discovered stretches of this unknown trail, too, after they had swept over Hill 150 against surprisingly light resistance. The monsoon season's heavy rains had virtually destroyed the trail and it seemed to disappear in the swamp as it led west.

Except for the brief fight at the trail block, the advance of the left and center of 1/7 was held up more by the waterlogged terrain than enemy opposition. Company C on the right of the battalion's line, however, was met by a wall of fire coming from hidden positions as it attempted to push through the jungle lowland to the west of Hill 150. No effective progress could be made and the attack stalled. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines ran up against what appeared to be a continuation of the same strongpoint. The men of 3/5 could not locate the origin of the defensive fire and were forced to dig in for protection soon after crossing the morning's line of departure. Towards nightfall, as the assault troops ceased the day's fruitless attack, elements of 3/7 were committed to cover a gap that had opened between 1/7 and 3/5.

The pattern of attack on 7 January followed closely the happenings on the 6th. The center assault companies could make no appreciable progress against concentrated enemy rifle, machine gun, and mor-

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[11] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 343.

[12] BACKHANDER TF Cir No. 1–43, dtd 9Nov43, Subj: Air Force and Target Bomblines, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 3.*

tar fire. The units on the flanks that attempted to turn the Japanese position found terrain, densely forested swamp and gully, that heavily favored the defenders. Soon the Marine lines resembled those at Suicide Creek, but the enemy stronghold which formed a slight salient was far more extensive than the one encountered in the fighting on 2–4 January.

During the hottest part of the day's action, Lieutenant Colonel McDougal was shot while he was up with his assault platoons. General Shepherd immediately asked division to send a suitable replacement. Major Joseph S. Skoczylas, 3/5's executive officer, who took command when McDougal was wounded, was hit himself later in the afternoon. Pending the arrival of a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Puller was ordered to take charge of 3/5 as well as 3/7. The following morning, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis W. Walt, who had just been appointed executive officer of the 5th Marines,[13] reached the front lines and assumed command of the 3d Battalion, 5th.

When the Marines attacked on 8 January, there was no let-up in the vicious, blind struggle. Units on the flanks of 3/5 made little progress against their unseen, dug-in opponents. The assault companies of Walt's battalion found the jungle undergrowth to their front became, if anything, more dense and tangled, while the enemy fire grew in intensity. As the men inched forward, they could feel the ground slowly rising beneath their feet, although no hill or ridge was visible in the dank jungle ahead. Walt was convinced he had discovered Aogiri Ridge by the time he pulled his battalion back to more secure night defensive positions. The ADC reported at 1800 that the previous 24 hours of fighting had cost his command casualties of 15 killed, 161 wounded, and 5 missing in action. No one could estimate accurately how much the defenders had suffered in the return fire.

The Japanese did not dissipate their strength in counterattacks this time but waited for the Marines to come on. The terrain and weather were all in the defenders' favor. Although the Marine engineers tried desperately to build a log causeway for tanks across the swamp to the center of the front, continued rain and rising water slowed their efforts to a crawl. The heaviest direct support available in the lines opposite Aogiri Ridge was a 37mm gun which was hauled up to 3/5's position late on 9 January.[14]

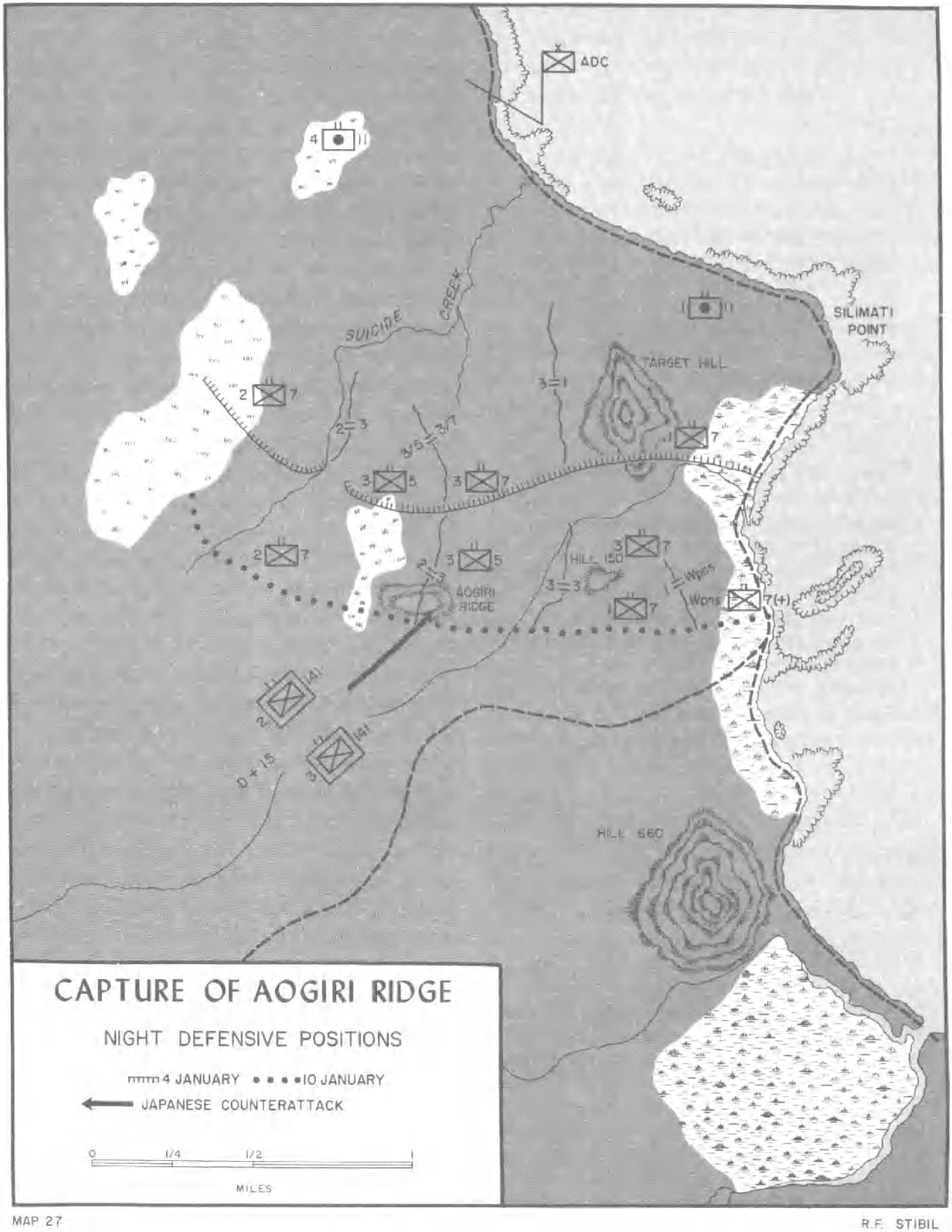
The day's main attack was delayed until 1630, while the 37mm was brought forward[15] and a heavy artillery preparation was laid down on the area which seemed to contain the fortress ridge. Two flanking attacks were mounted against the eastern side of the Japanese position as 3/5 inched ahead in the center. In the first assault, Company C of 1/7 destroyed two bunkers before a rising tide of defensive fire overwhelmed its further attempts to advance. The second attack, an enveloping movement made by Companies K and L of 3/7, which General Shepherd had attached to Walt's command, also sputtered to a halt as the Japanese beat back the threat to their rear areas.

Fittingly, the American breakthrough so sorely needed finally came on 3/5's front

[13] The regiment's former executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel William K. Enright, was appointed Assistant D–3 on 7 January as a replacement for Lieutenant Colonel Buse who was slated to take over 3/7.

[14] *Walt ltr.*

[15] *Ibid.*



MAP 27

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just as the day's heavy casualties and rugged going seemed likely to require another withdrawal. The situation is best described in the division special action report:

> The undergrowth was so thick that the men could not see ten yards in front of them. The Jap machine guns had been cleverly concealed among the roots of trees and were well protected by snipers. At dusk the forward elements were almost to the top of one end of the ridge. The situation was desperate. The assault elements had reached the limit of their physical endurance and morale was low. It was a question of whether or not they could hold their hard earned gains. It was then that Lieutenant Colonel Walt's leadership and courage turned the tide of the battle. Calling forward the 37mm gun he put his shoulder to the wheel and with the assistance of a volunteer crew pushed the gun foot by foot up Aogiri Ridge. Every few feet a volley of canister would be fired. As members of the crew were killed or wounded others ran forward to take their places. By superhuman effort the gun was finally manhandled up the steep slope and into position to sweep the ridge. The Marine and Jap lines were only ten yards apart in places. As night came on the Marines dug in where they were.[16]

The wedge-shaped position that Walt's battalion occupied on the forward slope and crest of the ridge was a precarious hold, indeed. On both flanks the Japanese still occupied some of the 37 interconnected bunkers which lined Aogiri's military crest. On the reverse slope, a second line of enemy positions had yet to be taken. The import of the Marine penetration was clear, however, and the Japanese had little choice but to counterattack and hurl back 3/5. Failing this, Aogiri Ridge was surely lost.

Sounds of a pending assault reached the Americans waiting in their foxholes and gun emplacements. Finally, at 0115 on the 10th, the Japanese came screaming up the slope, charging through a driving rain, and the Marines opened fire and cut them down. Three more times the enemy attacked, and Walt's weary men beat back each attempt. The enemy was so close that Walt, in his command post 50 yards behind the most forward positions, could clearly hear the chant that heralded the fourth attack, "Marines you die, prepare to die." [17]

Scant minutes before the Japanese launched a fifth assault, a battalion headquarters detail brought up a resupply of small-arms ammunition. The sorely needed bandoliers and belts were passed down the front lines to men who had used all but their last few rounds. At this juncture, the Marine artillery which had been firing all night was called upon for a maximum effort. Walt directed his forward observer to walk the fire of 1/11 and 4/11 toward 3/5's lines to catch the Japanese as they charged. The artillery officer had to "adjust his fire, not by sight, but by ear, depending always on his ability to pick out the burst of his guns from the tornado of sound about him." [18] The fire was not lifted until 105mm shells were hitting 50

[16] *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase III, p. 10. Actually, the gun was already in position to support the attack and had fired three times before Japanese return fire cut the crew down from nine men to four. Walt called for volunteers to help push the gun forward, and when none were forthcoming, he and his runner crawled up to the gun and put their shoulders to the carriage with the others. Two more shots cleared a tunnel through the growth ahead; a sixth shot silenced an enemy machine gun. Several volunteers then joined the group pushing the gun and there was a general surge forward. *Walt ltr.*

[17] *Walt ltr.*

[18] Luckey, "Cannon, Mud, and Japs," p. 54.

yards from where the Marines crouched in their holes. At the height of this attack, a Japanese major broke through the front lines and almost reached Walt's position before he was killed by fragments from a short round of artillery fire bursting in the trees overhead.[19] The remnants of the enemy force which had started the fifth counterattack wilted and ran in the face of fire from rifles and machine guns that took up the fight where the artillery ceased.

With dawn, the battle was over and not a single Japanese remained alive to defend Aogiri Ridge, soon renamed Walt's Ridge by the division commander. During the night's attacks, most of *3/141*, Colonel Katayama's only strong reserve, had been committed against the Marines; the enemy major who had died leading the fourth attack was apparently the battalion commander. At 0800, the men of 3/5 rose out of their foxholes and walked forward down the ridge, threading their way through scores of bodies sprawled in the awkward poses of those who had died violently. There was no opposition to the advance, and the section of trail behind Aogiri which the Japanese had fought so desperately to hold passed easily into Marine hands.

After the fall of the ridge, only one pocket of resistance remained, the defenses that had held up the units on the right flank of 1/7 through four days of dogged struggle. Elements of the *2d Battalion, 141st Infantry* were fighting to the last man to protect a supply dump that lay along the trail where it passed through the lowland between Aogiri and Hill 150. On 10 January, Lieutenant Colonel Weber's assault units kept probing the enemy position but could make no headway without incurring heavy losses. Even when a platoon of light tanks and two half tracks were finally able to reach the front on the 11th, tank-infantry teams had to fight at close quarters for four hours before the last Japanese soldier died in a futile effort to hold his ground. Once the pocket was wiped out, 1/7 surged forward to straighten out the Marine line which stood poised before the campaign's last major objective, Hill 660.

After the Aogiri Ridge battle, the 1st Marine Division totaled its losses since D-Day as 170 men killed, 6 died of wounds and 4 of other causes, and 636 wounded in action; 588 of the sick and wounded had been evacuated to hospitals on New Guinea. Intelligence officers reported the *Matsuda Force's* losses as 2,402 dead and 11 prisoners; wounded Japanese were estimated to equal the number killed.[20]

HILL 660 [21]

Marine patrols were active all along the front on 12 January trying to fix the limits of the next Japanese defensive position. No enemy troops were encountered along the coastal track short of Hill 660, and none were met at all by scouts who travelled almost a mile beyond Aogiri Ridge along the trail to Nakarop. Behind the screen of patrol activity, the units chosen to make the assault on Hill 660 rested and refitted.

General Shepherd picked the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines for the job of taking

[19] *Walt ltr.*

[20] OB Western New Britain, dtd 11Jan44, in ALAMO G-2 Weekly Rept No. 23, dtd 13Jan44, in *ALAMO G-3 Jnl No. 16.*

[21] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase III, Extension of Beachhead Perimeter and Capture of Hill 660; *1st MarDiv D-3 Jnl-I;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

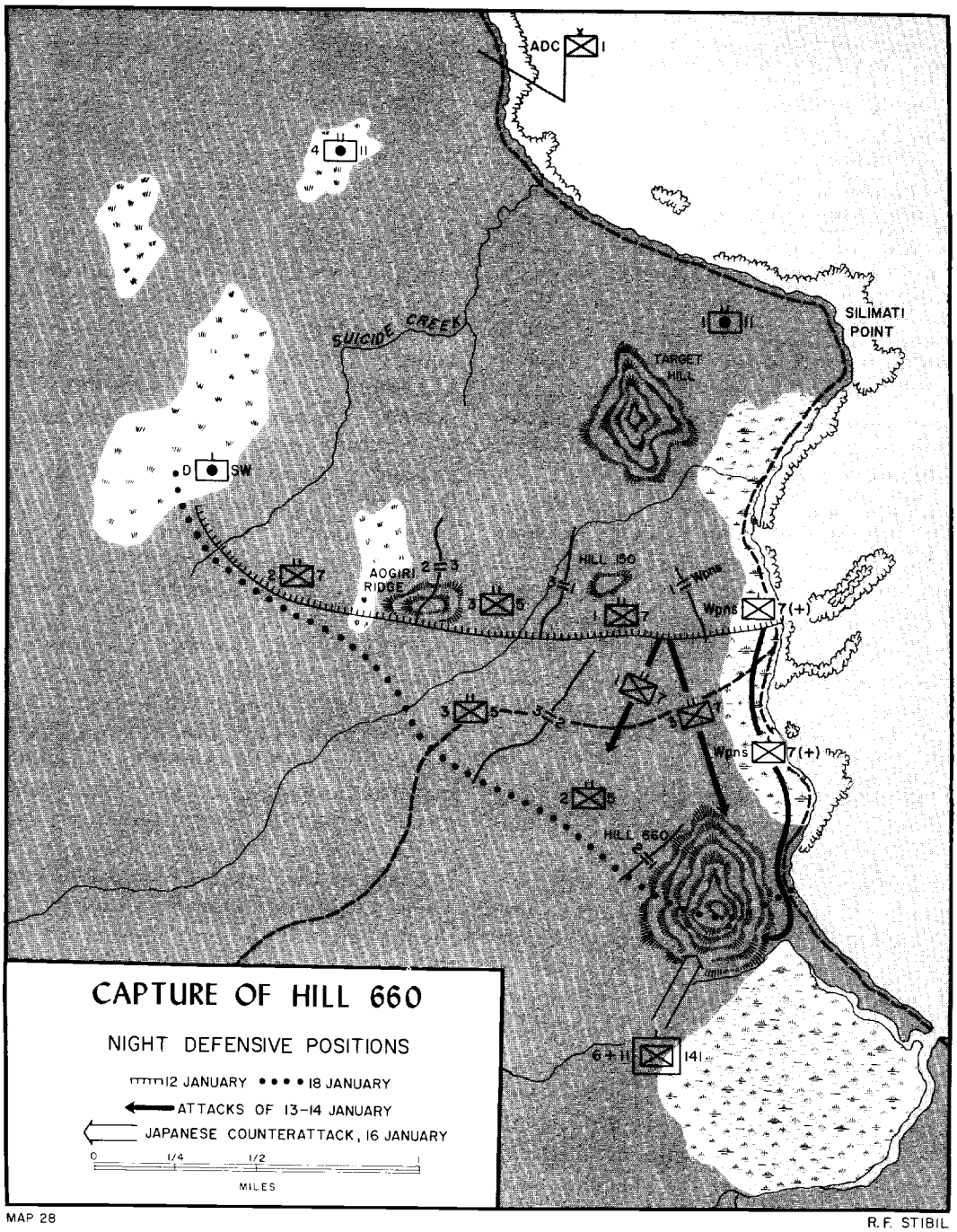
the jungle height. The battalion, under its new commander, Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Buse, Jr., rejoined the companies that had been attached to 3/5 and pulled out of its reserve position to occupy a line of departure to the east of Hill 150. The 1st Battalion, 7th was given orders to keep contact with 3/7 as it advanced to extend the perimeter southward. A thorough mop-up and consolidation of the Aogiri Ridge position was assigned to 3/5, which was to hold where it stood. On the right flank, 2/7, which was occupying ground that had been determined upon as part of the Force Beachhead Line, was directed to dig in and improve its defenses. (See Map 28.[22])

An important role in the pending attack was assigned to a task force organized under Captain Joseph W. Buckley, commanding officer of the 7th Marines Weapons Company. The force was composed of two light tanks, two infantry platoons from 1/7, a 37mm platoon and two 75mm half tracks from Buckley's company, a pioneer platoon with a bulldozer from 2/17, and one of the Army's rocket DUKWs. Buckley's command was to advance down the coastal trail and establish a road block between Hill 660 and Borgen Bay, thus cutting the most favorable escape route for enemy defenders. From captured documents, prisoners of war, and battlefield identifications, the ADC intelligence section had built up a pretty fair picture of what Japanese opposition might be encountered at Hill 660. The strength of the heavily armed roadblock force was considered sufficient for it to hold its own against anything the enemy garrison might try.

The looming hill was too big a target to miss, and bombers, artillery, and mortars all had a field day during the preparatory bombardment. When the Marines moved out at 0800 on the 13th, however, the hill's cover of jungle hid most of the scars of the pounding it had taken. The infantrymen approaching 660 were too experienced to expect that the shells and bombs had done much damage to the Japanese burrowed into the ground beneath the thick foliage.

Lieutenant Colonel Buse's battalion advanced in a column of companies with Company I in the lead. The tanks, which started forward with the assault platoons, were soon left behind bogged in the mud, and the infantry continued without armored support. Company I reached the foot of Hill 660 along its northwest slopes at about 0930, and immediately started through a ravine cluttered with brush and boulders that rimmed the base. As the Marines climbed up the hill proper, they found the slopes so steep that many of them had to sling their rifles and pull themselves upward, seizing holds in the wet undergrowth and clawing their way in the slippery mud underfoot. Suddenly, right in the face of the struggling climbers, the Japanese opened fire with machine guns and rifles from the undergrowth above. The advancing line of skirmishers could do little but fling themselves down and try to work into a position to return the fire.

[22] The locations of the front line and boundary lines shown for 12 January on this map, taken from the division periodic report and a similar map done for Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, have been questioned. According to the former commander of 3/5, the boundary between his battalion and 2/7 was 500 yards east of Aogiri Ridge, and the front line was generally 1,500 yards forward of where it is shown. *Walt ltr.*



MAP 28

R.F. STIBIL

Lieutenant Colonel Buse sent Company L around to the right of Company I in an effort to outflank the enemy defenders, but all attempts of this sort failed. The Japanese positions stretched around the hill were sited for mutual protection, and Company L was eventually stalled on the lower slopes. One enemy machine gun was able to lay a band of fire behind the Marines on the hill and the two companies were pinned down front and rear. When engineers were finally able to work a light tank forward to the lip of the ravine in midafternoon, its covering fire, together with artillery and mortar support, enabled the stranded Marines to pull back to more defensible night positions.

While 3/7 had not been able to accomplish much during the day's action, Captain Buckley's command was successful in attaining its objective. The pioneers' bulldozer with the task force performed yeoman service helping move the various vehicles through the deepest mud on the coastal track. By 1030, the roadblock was set up, and Buckley had his men digging in for all-around defense on a 100-yard wide stretch of flat land between the bay shore and a swamp that edged the southern face of Hill 660.

During its approach to the objective, Buckley's column was fired on by a nest of automatic weapons located near the crest of the hill. The enemy guns were laid to cover the coastal track and were in defilade positions in relation to the Weapons Company half tracks in the roadblock. Although the Marine 75s could not place direct fire on the troublesome weapons, their high explosive shells hit close enough to drive the Japanese crews away from their pieces whenever it was necessary. With the aid of the half track's suppressive fire, wire crews were able to run a line through to the roadblock from the ADC's command post.

After an uneventful night during which 1/11 peppered Hill 660 with harassing fire, the pack battalion and 4/11 fired a 1,200-round preparation to pave the way for 3/7's attack. Buse's assault elements descended into the base ravine at 0900 and began climbing the hillside, advancing very slowly against determined opposition. As they had on the 13th, the Marines kept working their way around the hill feeling for a soft spot in the Japanese defenses. Tanks were able to follow and deliver supporting fire until they were stopped by two deep ravines that cut the southern slope. Despite the loss of tank support against the enemy machine gun positions, the attacking infantrymen kept moving upward, gradually driving back the Japanese. The ground rose so steeply near the hill top that some assault units had to haul themselves up hand over hand to reach the summit. Fortunately, Marine 60mm mortars were able to silence most of the enemy cannon and machine guns that were clustered in open emplacements on the hill crest before they could do much damage. Riflemen of 3/7 attacking behind the lethal shower of mortar shells quickly scattered the remnants of the defenders in headlong flight down the hillsides. Some of the retreating Japanese ran directly into the sectors of fire of Buckley's roadblock; others took refuge in the swamp. Buse's battalion was clearly in possession of the important ground on Hill 660 as dusk approached.

Two companies of 2/7 moved into line on the right of the 3d Battalion shortly before dark as a wise precaution against counterattack. As the Marines dug in, the

heavens opened up and a drenching rain flooded down. All night long the torrent of water fell, soaking the weary men who had climbed and fought through a hot, muggy day. But if it made the life of the victors miserable, the rain also prevented the Japanese from gathering their force for an attack to regain the hill.

At 660's base, the Marines in Captain Buckley's roadblock had a lively night. Small groups of enemy stragglers kept trying to go through or around the American position and were either driven off or killed. Twelve Japanese soldiers were shot down attempting to wade through the offshore waters, and two were killed who ventured too close to the cleared fields of fire of the Marine guns. The enemy activity died away with the coming of daylight and the end of the shrouding rain.

On the 15th, the Marines were treated to a spell of clear weather and sunshine. Most men rested, while combat patrols ranged the brush on the sides of Hill 660 hunting down the Japanese trapped within the American lines. Only a few scattered enemy were caught in the mopping up activity, and there appeared to be no indication that large forces were in the vicinity to threaten the Marine position. As a reasonable precaution, however, additional automatic weapons were brought up to 3/7's front lines and emplaced during the day.

The Japanese were not ready to give up Hill 660 without at least one thrust at the men who had driven them off it. A counterattack force, largely made up of the *6th* and *11th Companies* of the *141st Infantry*, gathered in the swamp south of the hill during the daytime hours of 15 January and then moved forward quietly to the base of the hill well after dark. Finally, at 0630 on the 16th, the enemy troops began a screaming, scrambling charge up the precipitous slopes to get at the Marine positions. The first few soldiers to the top fought at close quarters, but the tremendous volume of defensive small-arms fire drove the Japanese back and pinned them down, as their own fire had once slowed the Marines attempting to take the hill. As soon as he had the enemy cleared away from in front of 3/7's lines, Lieutenant Colonel Buse ordered the rifle companies' 60mm mortar sections to hit the front of the enemy formation while the battalion's 81mm platoon fired on the rear. Then, in a deadly squeeze, the impact areas were moved toward each other. The attack and the attackers died in a welter of mortar explosions.

Patrols on Hill 660 found 110 fresh bodies after the last gasp of the counterattack had faded. Captain Buckley's roadblock crew had wiped out 48 more Japanese in repulsing a weaker effort to overrun their position. Altogether, the three days of action swirling about Hill 660 had cost the enemy over 200 dead and an unknown number of wounded. The cost to the Marines was about 50 men killed and wounded.

The capture of Hill 660 and the repulse of the counterattack to retake it marked the effective end of the Japanese defense of the Cape Gloucester-Borgen Bay area. In the following months, the *Matsuda Force* was to try with increasing desperation to escape from western New Britain, while the BACKHANDER Force kept pressure on the retreating enemy troops.

75MM HALF TRACK *and 37mm gun of Weapons Company, 7th Marines which helped beat back a Japanese counterattack on Hill 660.* (*USMC 71580*)

JAPANESE FLAGS *are displayed by the weary Marines who captured them, as elements of Combat Team C leave the front lines after 23 days of fighting.* (*USMC 71602*)

Eastward to Iboki

ARAWE REVISITED [1]

In many respects, Arawe was a sideshow to the main campaign for control of western New Britain. Occasionally, the fighting there was violent, marked by bloody clashes in the enveloping jungle; at other times, days went by with only minor patrol action. General Cunningham had accomplished his major objective when the 112th Cavalry assault troops seized control of Arawe Peninsula. Further operations to clear the Japanese from the area were undertaken primarily to remove a lurking threat to the DIRECTOR Force's position. On the enemy side of the front, Major Komori was determined to hold the Americans back from an objective that they actually did not want—Lupin airfield. (See Map 24.)

Allied press claims of the capture of the grass-choked airstrip, which were broadcast right after Z-Day, considered ground patrolled to be ground controlled. When Komori's *1st Battalion, 81st Infantry* forced the withdrawal of the 112th Cavalry's outposts on 25 December, the Japanese were convinced that they had regained possession of a desirable prize. Komori's primary mission became the denial of the airfield site to the Americans.

The defenses closing off the neck of Arawe Peninsula were the target of repeated small-scale Japanese attacks during the last week of December. The 112th's lines held firm, and the enemy troops reeled back, shaken and hurt, after each unsuccessful effort. The American artillery and mortar fire was particularly galling to the Japanese who were given no rest from punishment even though they broke contact. On the 29th, after eight days of wandering in the jungle, the *1st Battalion, 141st Infantry* reached Komori's positions, and the enemy commander directed the new arrivals to take over the front lines. The depleted companies of *1/81* and the original Merkus garrison were assigned to hold the rear areas of the wide sector from Omoi to the Pulie River which was Komori's defensive responsibility.

With the arrival of *1/141*, the Japanese ceased their attacks on the American positions. Instead, in the jungle about 400–500 yards forward of the 112th's lines, the enemy soldiers constructed a defense in depth, a complex of foxholes, trenches, and weapons emplacements that gave them alternate positions from which to cover approach routes. Patrols of cavalrymen discovered the Japanese were digging in

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl;* 112th CavRegt, HistRept 24Nov43–10Feb44, dtd 10Feb44 (WW II RecsDiv, FRC Alex); Co B, 1st TkBn SAR, 9Jan–12May44, dtd 27May44; *17th Div Ops; Komori Diary;* ATIS Item No. 9773, Diary of unidentified platoon commander, 1st MG Co, 1/141, 21Dec43–16Jan44, in ATIS Bul No. 789, dtd 11Mar44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex); Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

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on the 1st, but were unable to drive them back. Repeatedly, in following days, the Americans attacked the Japanese, but without success. Shifting frequently from hole to hole, using the concealment offered by a thick mat of undergrowth and the shallow connecting trenches they had dug, the men of the *1/141* were quite successful in holding their ground. On 6 January, General Cunningham told General Krueger that "officers and men participating in these operations report they have not seen a single Japanese and that they are unable to locate machine guns firing on them from a distance of 10 to 20 yards." [2]

Cunningham asked that he be sent reinforcements, noting that artillery and mortar fire seemed to have little effect on the hidden Japanese positions. He stated his belief that to continue attacks "along present lines is to play with the enemy's hand." [3] The ALAMO Force commander was asked for tanks to help root out and destroy the defenses that the American soldiers faced. Krueger took immediate steps to answer the request from Arawe, and a Marine tank platoon was underway from Finschhafen on 9 February, together with a company of the 2d Battalion, 158th Infantry.

The only tank unit available for reinforcement of Cunningham's force was Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, which had been left behind because of the limited operating area for armor at Cape Gloucester when the BACKHANDER Force sailed. When the 1st Marine Division commander was informed of the contemplated commitment of some of his armor reserve—and promised that the tanks would be returned to his control when they were required—he suggested that all of Company B be employed. Rupertus noted that the tank company was the smallest self-sustained unit for combat operations.[4] Accordingly, the remainder of Company B boarded an LCT on the 11th and made a stormy overnight passage through rough seas to Arawe.

From 13 to 15 January, while the 112th Cavalry continued pressuring the Japanese with combat patrols, the Marine tankers worked with the two companies of 2/158 which were to make the principal effort against the enemy position. The infantrymen provided a squad to cover each light tank and rehearsed tactics for the assault, while tank and infantry officers made a thorough reconnaissance of the zone of attack. The plan called for two five-tank platoons, each with an infantry company in support, to advance on a 500-yard-wide front on 16 January. The day's objective was 1,000 yards from the line of departure, and within the intervening distance lay all the maze of defenses that the *1st Battalion, 141st Infantry* had held so doggedly for two weeks.

On the morning of the 16th, a squadron of B–24s dropped 136 1,000-pound bombs on the Japanese defenses, and 20 B–25s followed with a heavy strafing and bombing attack.[5] This aerial preparation, coupled with an intensive artillery and 81mm mortar bombardment, paved the way for the assault. The tanks led off and kept moving forward despite soft ground and

[2] CG, US Forces, APO 323, msg to CG, ALAMO Force, APO 712, dtd 6Jan44, Subj: Ops DIRECTOR TF, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 15.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *1st MarDiv D–3 Jnl—I*, entries nos. 16 and 17 of 8Jan44.

[5] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 335.

bomb craters which caused several machines to bog down until recovery vehicles could pull them free. Working well together, despite incredibly thick vegetation which practically blinded the tank drivers and commanders, the tank-infantry teams churned and shot their way through the enemy position. When a pocket of resistance developed on the right of the line, a section of the reserve tank platoon and a troop of the 112th quickly finished off the holdouts while the advance continued. By 1600, the predetermined objective had been reached, and Cunningham ordered a withdrawal to the peninsula's main line of resistance. Two tanks, one which had thrown a track on a steep slope and another which was hopelessly bogged down in swampy ground, were destroyed by demolitions to prevent their use as enemy strongpoints when the Americans pulled back.

The attack of 16 January accomplished its objective. Komori ordered the remnants of *1/141* to withdraw to the Lupin vicinity where they could "fight to the glorious end to defend the airfield." [6] The few Japanese who did not get the word to retreat were wiped out on the 17th by flame-throwing tanks and a supporting force of cavalrymen. When the battered enemy troops paused to regroup in positions near the airfield, the *Komori Force's* commander made a head count and found that his two understrength battalions and their supporting units had lost 116 killed in action and 117 wounded in three weeks fighting. In addition, 14 men had died of various illnesses and 80 more were sick enough to be unfit for duty. The sick roll promised to grow, for the Japanese were on short rations and the amount of food to be doled out shrank daily. One ineffective airdrop of supplies was received on New Year's Eve,[7] an event that did more to whet appetites than appease them. Primary reliance was placed on supply by barge from Gasmata and by carrying parties using the trail to Iboki. Neither method was satisfactory; the last barge to get through the gantlet of preying torpedo boats and planes reached the Pulie River mouth on 5 February, and the carriers were unequal to the task of keeping up with consumption. The *Komori Force* slowly starved while it held an objective that the Americans showed little sign of wanting.

Mounting doubts about the utility of the airfield he defended plagued Major Komori. American light planes were flying over his positions, and the Lupin garrison reported that they could hear the takeoffs from Arawe Peninsula. The DIRECTOR Force engineers had built an emergency strip for artillery observation planes on 13 January and, with grading and coral surfacing, it soon came into regular use. By 8 February, the disillusioned Japanese commander was reporting to his superiors that the value of Lupin "is so insignificant that it seems the enemy has no intention of using it." He outlined the increasing difficulty of holding his position with dwindling supplies and concluded that his force would soon be cut off and left "with no alternative but self-destruction." [8]

At first, Komori's broad hints that he be allowed to abandon his untenable defenses were answered by orders that he

[6] *Komori Diary*, entry of 17Jan44.

[7] Each man in 1/141 received 16½ ounces of rice, 5 vitamin pills, and a packet of tobacco from this airdrop. ATIS Item No. 9773, *op. cit.*, entry of 1Jan44.

[8] *Komori Diary*, entry of 8Feb44.

continue to "smash the enemy's project for construction of an airfield." [9] The *Komori Force's* supposed exploits in holding Lupin, recognized by two Imperial citations, formed a bright spot in an otherwise dismal picture of withdrawal and defeat of the Japanese forces in western New Britain. Eventually, the *17th Division* had to face the fact that if it did not give Komori permission to pull out and join the general exodus, he and his men would be isolated and destroyed. On 24 February, Komori's radio crackled out the eagerly awaited retirement order and he lost no time quitting Arawe. Passing on the word to his scattered elements to abandon their positions and head north up the track through Didmop, Komori was soon on his way toward a mid-island trail junction at Upmadung and a rendezvous with the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* which was to cover the *Matsuda Force's* withdrawal. (See Map 29.)

A month of patrol clashes and ambushes had convinced General Cunningham that it was worthwhile to clear the whole Arawe area of Japanese troops. As *1/141* was abandoning its defensive sector near Lupin, an attack force composed of 2/112 and the tanks of Company B was making final preparations to drive them out. On the 27th, when the American force advanced to the airfield and beyond, they found that their quarry had eluded them.

The bloodless attack saw the birth of a new technique of communication between tank crews and the men they supported. Dissatisfied with the radio links they had with the infantry, particularly the close-in supporting squads, the Marine tankers installed field telephones at the rear of their machines through which the riflemen could contact the tank commanders. The improvement in tank-infantry cooperation was immediate, and the innovation proved to be sound enough to have a permanent part in armored support tactics.

In the several weeks before the Japanese withdrew beyond the Pulie River and gave up the airfield, General Cunningham's force suffered a few scattered casualties in patrol actions. The sum of these added little to the official total for the DIRECTOR Force in the campaign, 118 killed, 352 wounded, and 4 missing in action, which was compiled as of 10 February. That date was declared the end of DEXTERITY Operations by General Krueger. It marked the link-up of Australian troops advancing overland from Sio on the Huon Peninsula with the American task force that had seized Saidor; it also was the day when Marine and Army patrols from the BACKHANDER and DIRECTOR Forces were supposed to have met at Gilnit on the Itni River. This event, which actually took place a few days later than ALAMO Force reported it, signified the completion of the "assigned mission of establishing control over the western tip of New Britain." [10]

SOUTHERN PATROLS [11]

The Gilnit meeting between patrols from the two Allied task forces on New

[9] *Ibid.*, entry of 9Feb44.

[10] *DEXTERITY Rept.*

[11] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl; 1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase IV, Extensive Patrolling of Western New Britain-Borgen Bay-Itni River Area and Occupation of Rooke Island; ATIS Item No. 10874, Diary of unidentified member of 51st ReconRegt, 29Dec43–29Mar44, in ATIS Bul No. 939, dtd 20Apr44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex), hereafter *51st ReconRegt Diary; 17th Div Ops;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

Britain was less significant an event than it had appeared it would be during the planning stages of DEXTERITY. Intelligence available before the operation had indicated that only two main routes of withdrawal from Cape Gloucester were available to the Japanese garrison. One of these lay south toward Gilnit and Cape Bushing and the other followed the northern coast. A maze of native trails, most of them narrow and difficult to travel, was known to exist in the jungle waste in the island's interior, but the exact, or even approximate, location of these trails was not known.

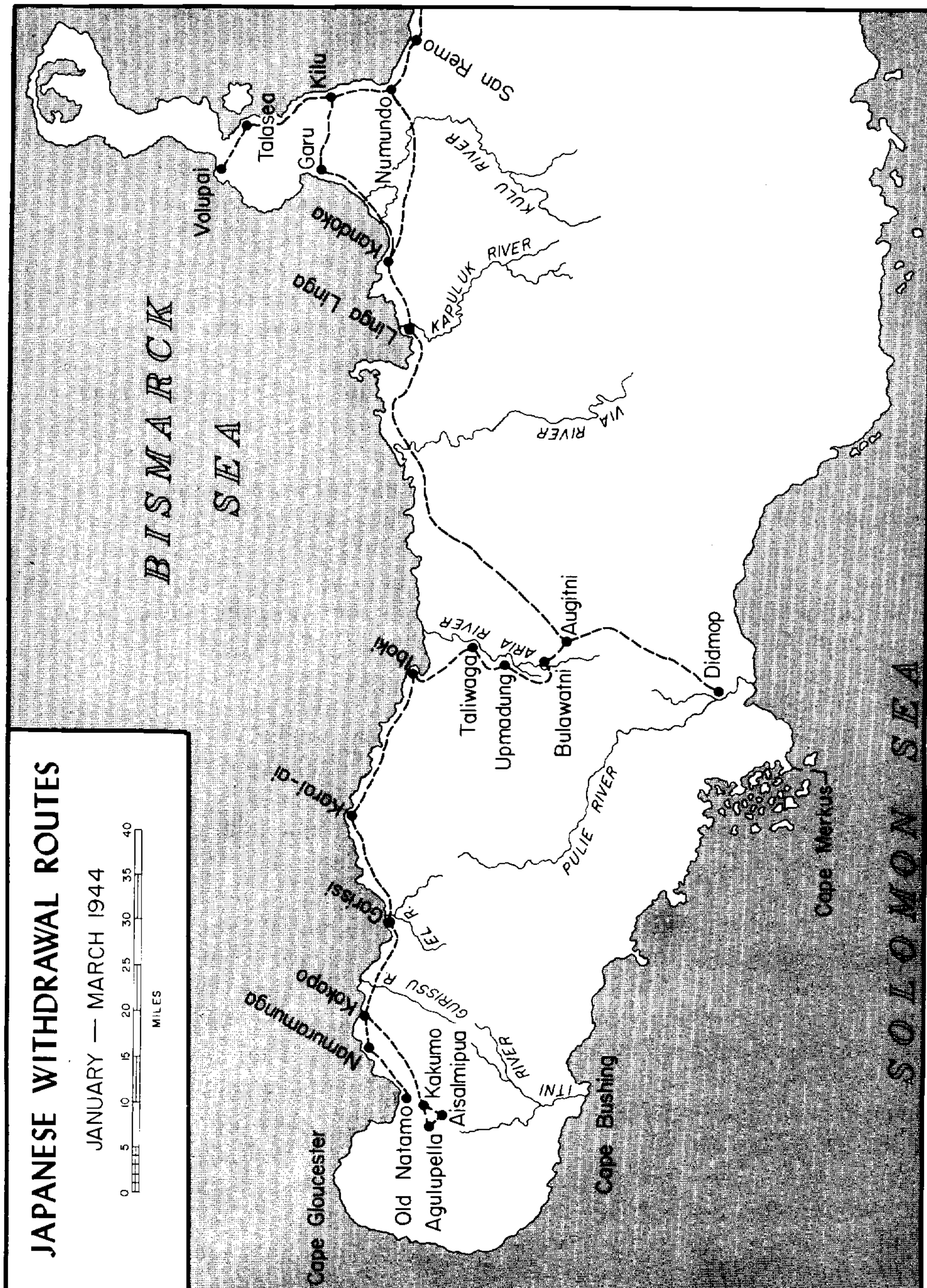
Gradually, as the fighting at Cape Gloucester wore on, the weight of evidence accumulating in the hands of the Allies indicated that the northern trail-net was the only practical withdrawal route for the Japanese. The efficiency of the anti-barge campaign, the rugged nature of the terrain along the southern coast, and the presence of DIRECTOR Force at Arawe combined to give the enemy little chance to use the Cape Bushing area as a jump-off point for further movement east by sea or land. Even though the 1st Division became increasingly sure that the Japanese would retreat by northern routes, it could not neglect the possibility that the trails south to the Itni would be used. Native reports that sizeable bodies of enemy troops were in the Gilnit area continued to come in after the *141st Infantry* was identified in the fighting around the BACKHANDER beachhead. (See Map 23.)

The only certain answer to the question of what the Japanese were doing lay in aggressive patrolling. An Army observer attached to the 1st Division during early January noted that the Marines were "patrol conscious" and that "all units are encouraged to exert the maximum effort in patrolling as it is felt this activity is the best means possible for keeping up morale and alertness." [12] This description fitted the actions of the 1st and 5th Marines closely in the period following the capture of the airdrome. While the ADC group drove forward against the enemy troops holding the Borgen Bay defenses, the Marines guarding the newly won airfields sought the elements of the *53d Infantry* that had scattered after the fall of Razorback Hill.

Combat and reconnaissance patrols made a thorough search of the jungle lowland and foothills bordering the airfield perimeter, driving Japanese stragglers before them and securing the ground. The debris left by the enemy in retreat eventually revealed the main track over Mt. Talawe, but progress along its trace was slow and painstaking. Each branching trail, and there were many, had to be checked before the area of patrol effort could be extended. The primary mission of the BACKHANDER troops was the security of the airfields, and there was no inclination to overlook any Japanese group whose attacks might delay construction progress.

Behind the Marine-manned perimeter and the active screen of patrols, Army aviation engineers labored around the clock to build a runway and hardstands on the site of Airfield No. 2. Work on Airfield No. 1 was abandoned almost as soon as it began, when it became apparent that the field that could be built would not be worth the effort necessary to ready it for use. The Japanese had made no attempt to drain their airstrips or to obtain prac-

[12] Col J. F. Bird memo to Deputy CofS, ALAMO For, dtd 9 Jan44, Subj: Rept on BACKHANDER Ops 1–7Jan44, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 15.*


JAPANESE WITHDRAWAL ROUTES
JANUARY — MARCH 1944
0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40
MILES
BISMARCK SEA
SOLOMON SEA
Volupai
Talasea
Kilu
San Remo
Garu
Numundo
Kandoka
Linga Linga
KULU RIVER
KAPULUK RIVER
VIA RIVER
ARIA RIVER
Augitni
Iboki
Taliwaga
Upmadung
Bulawatni
Didmop
Karai-ai
PULIE RIVER
Cape Merkus
Gorissi
EL R
GURISSU R
Kokopo
Namuramunga
ITNI RIVER
Cape Bushing
Old Natamo
Kakumo
Agulupella
Aisalmipua
Cape Gloucester
R.F. STIBIL
MAP 29

tical gradients, and, as a result, when the 1913th Aviation Engineer Battalion began work on 3 January it was plagued by drainage problems caused by the heavy rains.[13] Often the engineers' bulldozers and graders appeared to be working in an enormous mud trough, as they sought to find firm ground on which to construct the field. A second aviation engineer battalion began work on the runway on 13 January, and a third came in on the 17th to build the necessary hardstands and roads. The only letup in construction activity occurred when a Japanese bomber made a nuisance raid, and the soldiers, like the Marines on the hills above them, headed for a safe place that would still afford them a view of the awesome antiaircraft barrage put up by the 12th Defense Battalion and the Army's 469th Antiaircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons) Battalion.

The Japanese had realistically concluded that air raids, and these only in irritant strength, were the only means left to them of hindering work on Cape Gloucester airfield. All during the period that the Marines who had seized the airdrome were conducting local patrols to consolidate the perimeter defenses, elements of the *53d Infantry* were holding blocking positions across the trails that led to Borgen Bay from Mt. Talawe and Sag Sag. General Matsuda had charged the *53d* with the task of defending the inland flank of the Japanese troops battling the Marines for Aogiri Ridge and Hill 660. Since American patrols from the airfield did not venture as far as the enemy trail blocks, and the Japanese showed an unusual lack of offensive spirit, there were no significant contacts between the two forces in the vast area south of Mt. Talawe. When the Marines did come over the mountain, the troops they ran into were not men from the badly mauled *53d Infantry* but elements of the fresh *51st Reconnaissance Regiment.*

Colonel Jiro Sato, the reconnaissance unit's commander, had received orders to evacuate Rooke Island soon after D-Day, but it was not until the night of 7 January that he was able to make his move to New Britain. Then, using landing craft that had been carefully hidden from the eager hunting of Allied planes and torpedo boats, most of Sato's 380-man force sailed undetected across Dampier Strait and up the Itni to Nigol. The regiment's rear echelon made the night crossing on the 15th. After he traveled north and reported to Matsuda's headquarters, Sato was given the mission of holding the western trail approaches to Nakarop and reinforcing the *53d Infantry's* position.

On 12 January, the enemy reconnaissance unit set up in the jungle near Aipati village, not far from the junction of the main government track from Sag Sag to Natamo with the trail leading to the airfield. Thus, on 19 January, when a strong patrol from 3/1 reached this spot, it was an outpost of the *3d Company* of the *51st* which it encountered. The Marines took the Japanese by surprise, killing six and driving off the rest, then scouted around long enough to make sure that they had found the main cross-island track before returning to base. The American discovery of this important trail occasioned the dispatch of strong combat patrols from the airfield, but these started too late to run

[13] OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Airfield and Base Development—Engineers in the Southwest Pacific 1941–1945*, v. VI (Washington: GPO, 1951), pp. 193–194.

into anything but rear-guard action by the Japanese.

By 21 January, the *Matsuda Force* was under orders to withdraw from western New Britain. The *17th Division* commander, General Sakai, had recommended the move about mid-January, arguing that the combination of steadily mounting combat losses and the effective throttling of the sea supply route meant the eventual annihilation of all the troops under Matsuda.[14]

The authorities at Rabaul shared Sakai's pessimistic view of the situation, and General Imamura authorized a withdrawal to the Talasea area.[15] The movement was actually underway before the formal order was issued.

When the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* took up positions guarding the trail complex south of Mt. Talawe, it was replacing part of the *53d Infantry*, mainly detachments of sick and wounded, who were headed east away from the scene of the fighting. On the 16th, General Sakai added to this movement of "forces not having combat strength" by directing General Matsuda to send all such men to the Iboki-Karai-ai sector and to dispatch elements of his command to "occupy key points along the north coast and protect rear supply lines, making these points bases for counterattacks." [16] The units selected, the *65th Brigade Engineers*, the *31st Road Construction Unit*, and two field hospitals, had the mission of improving the coastal track and preparing casualty convalescent stations at Kokopo, Karai-ai, Iboki, Upmadung, Kandoka, and Numundo. (See Map 29.)

On the 21st, the formal withdrawal order was sent to Matsuda, directing him to disengage his units in contact with the Americans and concentrate in the Iboki area prepared for further movement to Talasea. General Sakai's chief of staff understated the case when he commented that "this withdrawal, under present formations and over existing terrain, will be an extremely difficult one." Ominously, he predicted that if the arrangements to send the sick and wounded to the rear proved "too obvious an obstruction to the efficient execution of the withdrawal, unavoidable instances when wounded and sick must be disposed of are to be expected." [17]

General Matsuda set up a schedule of withdrawal that put the *53d Infantry* and *23d Field Artillery* on the trail first, but only as far as the east bank of the Natamo River, where strong defenses were constructed to cover the retreat of the main body. According to plan, all of the *Matsuda Force* would be across the Natamo by 1 February, using trails that converged on a main track which skirted the immediate coastal region until it reached the vicinity of Kokopo. The existence of this track was known to the Allies, but they had no way of pinpointing its loca-

[14] Docu No. 52399, Statement of Ex-LtGen Yasushi Sakai, in HistDiv, MilIntelSec, GHQ, FEC, Statements of Japanese Officials on WW II, v. III, p. 190 (OCMH).

[15] General Imamura's decision was not made as a direct result of General Sakai's recommendation, but rather was a conclusion he reached independently. Imamura thought that he might be able to supply the *Matsuda Force* at Talasea. *Japanese comments.*

[16] AET No. 2026, ATIS AdvEch No. 2, dtd 18Feb44, 17th Div OpO A No. 82, dtd 16Jan44, in *ADC IntelDocuments.*

[17] ATIS Item No. 10452/e, 17th Div CofS Instns, dtd 21Jan44, based on 17th Div OpO A No. 84, in ATIS Bul No. 883, dtd 4Apr44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex).

tion until patrols actually walked along its path.

In recognition of the comparative good shape of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment*, Matsuda designated Sato's unit as rear guard to cover both stages of the enemy withdrawal, the disengagement from contact in western New Britain and defense of the Japanese rear after most of the men had made the exhausting march to Iboki. The *51st* was to take up positions on the Aria River southeast of Iboki, holding open both the track from the coast which swung inland there and the trail overland to Komori's force at Arawe. On 24 January, Sato moved to Nakarop where he got his withdrawal orders, and, four days later, he was marching east at the tail of the Matsuda column.

The reconnaissance troops, like most Japanese combat units, made a deliberate withdrawal. Covering forces, strong enough to hold off sizeable American patrols, set up in ambush at various stages in the retreat. Usually, when action was joined, the Marines attacked to develop the strength and dispositions of the enemy unit opposing them, then pulled back to gather reinforcements, and came on again to wipe out the blocking force. Quite often when the attack was renewed the Japanese had moved on, and the only sensible course for the following troops was a wary, methodical pursuit.

Most of the Marine patrols reported that the Japanese appeared to be retreating south, an observation explained by the fact that many of the feeder trails in the web that cut the cross-island track led south at first, then east, and finally either north toward Kokopo or south again toward Gilnit. The route that much of the *Matsuda Force* was using in retreat actually led off from the trail to Gilnit at a point below the trail junction at Agulupella. Small wonder then that there was a strong disposition on the part of BACKHANDER Force headquarters to scour the southern region for Japanese troops that might be there. Unquestionably, the victorious Marines had the strength to pursue any reasonable course in clearing western New Britain of the enemy. As it happened, the Japanese withdrawal from the southern part of Itni valley was complete. A patrol of platoon strength could probably have scouted the trail to Gilnit and Cape Bushing with safety, once it was past the area of rear guard action straddling the enemy withdrawal route. Not having the benefit of hindsight, the 1st Marine Division gave the task of checking Gilnit to a composite battalion. (See Map 23.)

The assembly of this battalion came at the end of a week of vigorous patrolling, marked by occasional sharp clashes with the enemy rear guard. Units from all three of the 1st Division's infantry regiments converged on Agulupella, the focal point of patrols coming from Sag Sag, the airfield, and the beachhead. As a result of an exchange of positions immediately following the capture of Hill 660, the 5th Marines with 2/1 attached held the beachhead, and the 7th and 1st Marines occupied the airfield perimeter. Units of the 5th made the initial contact with elements of the enemy's rear guard at Natamo Point on 20 January. Thereafter, the reinforced regiment, operating under the ADC's command, stuck close to the northern shore, driving ahead to close off the coastal track. Its sweep along Borgen Bay became the first leg of an advance that was eventually to find it landing in assault on Willaumez Peninsula.

In the center of the island, the first significant contact with the Japanese guarding Matsuda's rear, elements of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment*, came on 23 January. A composite company of 1/1 following the trail from the airfield ran into an enemy machine gun and a few protecting riflemen, whose fire held up the patrol temporarily until the advance guard drove them off. Then about 1,500 yards of cautious advance later, the same or a similar small group opened up on the Marines again. In the flurry of return fire two of the Japanese were killed and the rest fled. Holding up for the night in his own ambush position close to Mt. Langila, the patrol commander resumed his advance the next day until his lead elements were pinned down by the fire of at least one enemy rifle platoon reinforced with machine guns. The Japanese positions blended so artfully into the shrouding jungle that the Marines had little at which to aim. Though the patrol's return fire was heavy in volume, it had no apparent effect. Action was broken off, almost miraculously with no Marine casualties, and night defensive positions astride the trail were again occupied. On the 25th, the Marine patrol pulled back to await relief; its ammunition pouches were almost empty and the men were short of food. Half of the rations carried for the patrol by an ANGAU-led group of 40 native porters proved to be spoiled.

Company K of 3/1 made the relief on 26 January and moved out immediately toward the cross-island trail. After an uneventful day's march and a night in perimeter defense, Company K moved unchecked through the area where the Japanese had held off the Marines on the 24th. At the trail junction, the men from K ran into elements of a composite company of the 7th Marines which had landed from LCMs at Sag Sag on the 22d.

Travelling east on the government track and searching the surrounding area thoroughly, the 7th Marines' patrol had reached Aipati on the 24th. The next day, the trail junction was occupied, and the company followed the airfield trail for several hundred yards without finding any sign of the Japanese. On the 26th, this patrol pattern was repeated and in addition a platoon was sent half a mile to the south towards Agulupella; neither unit encountered any enemy. A small reconnaissance patrol, four Marines and three natives. moving cautiously along the main track, was ambushed near Niapaua, where trails forked to Nakarop and Agulupella. One of the scouts was killed before the men were able to slip away.

A 7th Marines patrol from Aipati travelled a mile toward Niapaua on the morning of the 27th without seeing any sign of live Japanese. When Company K of 3/1 reached the cross-island track, it borrowed a machine gun platoon from the 7th's composite company and started east to check the ambush site. Late in the afternoon, the scouts preceding the march formation sighted about 50 of the enemy set up on the far side of a stream that cut across the track. Prudently, the company commander held up for the night, ready to drive ahead in the morning. At 0700, 28 January, the Marines attacked and soon broke through the position spotted the day before. A short distance farther on, Company K ran into a storm of rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire that betrayed the presence of a reinforced company dug in across the track. The Japanese, holding high ground that commanded the Marine

position, were able to fend off all attempts to reach them, and the battle lapsed into a stalemated fire fight. After three hours of fruitless exchange, the Marines pulled back out of mortar range, taking 15 casualties with them.

Company K held its ground on the 28th while reinforcements, the rest of the 7th Marines company from Aipati and weapons elements of the 7th sent from the airfield, joined. Major William J. Piper, Jr., executive officer of 3/7, now took command of the combined group. Piper's force found the Japanese position abandoned when it advanced on the 30th and proceeded without hindrance to Niapaua. From there, Piper moved south to Agulupella where he had orders to await the formation of a larger force, designated the Gilnit Group.

Elements of the 5th Marines were also directed to join the enlarged patrol headed for Gilnit. Scouts and combat patrols from 2/1 and 2/5, pressing southwest along the trail behind Aogiri Ridge, encountered Japanese rear guard detachments and drove them off. On the 28th, Company E, 2/5, moved through Magairapua, once Colonel Katayama's headquarters, and then on to Nakarop, where General Matsuda was known to have been located. In both tiny villages and all along the trail between, there were deserted bivouac areas, littered with enemy gear but empty of troops. Matsuda's own quarters was so well camouflaged that its location near the trail was not discovered until several days later.

At Nakarop, Company E was joined by Major Barba's 1/5. Barba had broken off operations along the coast on 28 January and driven through Japanese delaying forces in an effort to reach Niapaua and aid Company K of 3/1 in reducing the trail block it had encountered. On the 29th, a heavily reinforced Company G, 2/5, and a large party of native carriers reached Nakarop from the beachhead. This force, dispatched by the ADC to join the Gilnit Group, plus Barba's battalion with Company E attached, filed into Agulupella on 30 January to unite with Major Piper's command. Lieutenant Colonel Puller was designated by General Rupertus to lead the combined units.

Puller's command, six reinforced rifle companies and headquarters elements, numbered 1,398 Marines, 3 Australian officers, and 150 native carriers. The supply problem posed by its size was staggering and not easily surmounted. So long as the group stayed in the vicinity of Agulupella, native carriers could just barely maintain it by a constant shuttle from the beachhead dumps. The condition of the trails deteriorated steadily as heavy traffic and flooding rains turned the paths into slithery channels of mud. As supply by hand-carry slowed, air drop, both by the division's Piper Cubs and Fifth Air Force B–17s, was instituted to keep Puller's men fed and provided with essential items of equipment.

During the buildup at Agulupella, evidence mounted that the Japanese had not fled south, evidence that soon included the actual withdrawal order dug up in a cache of staff papers found at Matsuda's headquarters, and the 1st Division decided to reduce the size of the Gilnit Group. Accordingly, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was detached, and the patrol strength dropped to 384 Marines plus the native carrier group. Puller had units of his command patrolling vigorously throughout the central part of the island while he

waited to build up sufficient reserve supplies to make the march to the south. A further complication arose when scouts discovered that a rain-swollen branch of the Itni near Arigilupua, about three miles from Agulupella, was too wide and deep for fording. Puller sent Company K, 3/1, to outpost Arigilupua while a detachment from the 17th Marines bridged the stream.

Captain George P. Hunt, the Company K commander, was given permission by Puller to reconnoiter the trail to the south, while the Gilnit Group was held up by the bridging operation. Hunt selected a small patrol of 11 men from his unit and set out down the well-defined track. With no enemy to stop him and no heavy equipment to slow him down, Hunt reached Nigol on the Itni in one day's march. Bivouacking for the night, the Marines moved about a mile farther to the river bank opposite Gilnit on the next day and then returned to Nigol. The only Japanese sighted in two days was a sick straggler who was sent back to Agulupella.

Puller received Hunt's report of his findings shortly before the main patrol started out for Gilnit. The bridge at Arigilupua was completed on 6 February, and Puller left with about half of his command immediately, meeting Hunt on the trail. Major Piper, who was serving as patrol executive officer, kept a portion of the unit with him and followed Puller, searching all the side trails and bivouac areas encountered. According to plan, the two elements of the patrol leapfrogged each other, exchanging personnel as necessary, with one group always moving ahead on the principal track while the other checked the jungle to either flank. Weapons crewmen, burdened with heavy loads of mortar and machine gun ammunition and parts, found the going particularly rugged. To all patrol members the trip was unforgettable, if only for the monotony of their steady diet of rain and K rations.

The food situation was dictated by the means of resupply. It had been decided to try to keep the patrol subsisted and equipped entirely by air drop, and the division's light planes were handed the task. The little Cubs, whose peak carrying capacity was two cases of K rations, one held on the observer's lap and the other placed on a desk behind him, flew all day long. Often the pilots logged 10–12 hours in the air, landing, refueling, and taking off again, in a regular pattern from dawn to dusk.[18] All drops were made at villages along the route, Arigilupua, Relmen, and Turitei, according to schedule, with special requests filled as they were received.

One of the items asked for by Puller in an urgent dispatch, several hundred bottles of mosquito lotion, raised a few eyebrows at division headquarters, but the request was filled promptly. The Gilnit Group commander's well-known disdain for the luxuries of campaigning caused the wonder, but the explanation was simple and a lesson in jungle existence. As a patrol member later remarked:

> Hell, the colonel knew what he was about. We were always soaked and everything we owned was likewise, and that lotion made the best damn stuff to start a fire with that you ever saw.[19]

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[18] Capt Richard M. Hunt, "General Rupertus' Improvised Air Force," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 33, no. 6 (Jun49), p. 17.

[19] Quoted by LtCol John S. Day in comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 7Mar52.

The advance party of the patrol reached the river opposite Gilnit on the 9th, and the main body arrived the following day. Puller sent a small scouting party across the Itni to the patrol objective; again there was no sign of recent enemy occupation. A platoon sent to Cape Bushing encountered no Japanese, but did find ample signs of the area's one-time garrison, the *141st Infantry*. Considerable quantities of weapons, ammunition, and equipment were found in the various enemy camps; surprisingly, there were even some food supplies left behind. Anything that was of use to division intelligence officers, or to ANGAU for distribution to the natives, was set aside; everything else was destroyed.

Puller was ordered to wait in the Gilnit area until he was contacted by the Army patrol dispatched from Arawe. According to the reports the Marines received, the soldiers were held up east of Gilnit by enemy opposition at Attulu Hill, once the *141st Infantry's* command post. Both native and Marine scouts explored the hill and found no Japanese, and Puller radioed division that in his opinion there were no enemy forces in the area to be discovered.

On the 14th, the division made its own contact with Puller when two LCMs with a platoon of 1/7 on board arrived from the airfield. The boats carried some extra supplies for the patrol which was about to set out on its return trip up the track to Agulupella. About midday on 16 February, elements of the Arawe patrol reached Gilnit via the river and met the platoon that Puller had left behind a few hours earlier for that purpose. Its mission fulfilled by the contact with the soldiers, the last Marine unit moved out briskly in the trace of Puller's column, bringing to an effective conclusion 1st Division combat operations in the southern Itni valley.

EASTERN PATROLS [20]

On the maps issued to BACKHANDER troops prior to D-Day, the coastal track that paralleled the shore of Borgen Bay appeared to be the most logical and, in fact, the only practical northern route of withdrawal for the Japanese. By the time enemy resistance collapsed at Hill 660, Marine intelligence officers were reasonably sure that their maps were wrong. Somewhere in the miles of jungle and swamp south and east of the bay were other trails, their existence confirmed by captured papers and the reports of natives and prisoners of war. The names of the villages of Aisalmipua and Kakumo began to crop up as way stations on a frequently used supply route, but the natives could not agree on their location, except to confirm that they lay along a trail from Agulupella to Kokopo. (See Map 29.)

The government track from Sag Sag that ended at the coast a few hundred yards west of Natamo Point was about the only trail that the Allies were sure existed in the Borgen Bay area. They were unaware of the presence of another trail which led to Nakarop from the east side of the point, this one broader, in better shape,

[20] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *1st MarDiv SAR*, Phase IV, Extensive Patrolling of Western New Britain-Borgen Bay-Itni River Area and Occupation of Rooke Island; 1st MarDiv D-2 Weekly Repts Nos. 5–10, dtd 29Jan–5Mar44; Col William H. Barba comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 17Mar52; Maj John S. Stankus comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 13Mar52; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign;* OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Amphibian Engineers*.

and partially corduroyed in its wettest stretches. Still a third important track not recorded on pre-invasion maps ran from the village of Old Natamo east of the Natamo River to Kakumo.

In order to effect their retreat without hindrance, the Japanese had to block the trails that led through Agulupella long enough for the main body of the *Matsuda Force* to get clear and started for Kokopo. In the center of the island, the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* executed this task with seeming ease, and along the coast the same job was performed well by a rear guard made up of elements of the *53d Infantry*, the *39th Field Antiaircraft Battalion*, and the *11th Company* of *3/141*. The vigorous resistance put up by these latter troops had the effect of clouding the issue of what route the *Matsuda Force* had taken. When they had delayed the Marines as long as was necessary to let the main body of the Japanese escape, the defenders just faded away. Helping the rear guard's withdrawal was the natural caution which characterized the patrol operations of veteran troops in the jungle.

At every natural obstacle along the trails that had to be used for any sizable troop movement, there was the threat of ambush. A sudden burst of fire from a single machine gun or a fusillade of shots from a few well-placed riflemen could be the cause of hours of delay. Much of the time the enemy could not be seen and the terrain stalled attempts to outflank his positions, leaving just the few men at the point of a patrol to reply to the fire that swept the trail clear. Under the circumstances, it took steady nerves, quick reactions, and a considerable amount of quiet courage to be a scout and take the lead on a patrol into enemy-held territory. The situation was ideal for a few determined Japanese, probably no more than 300 by the last few days in January, to hold up the advance of thousands.

The coastal track rimming Borgen Bay looped across the base of Natamo Point, making the narrow, jungle-covered spit of land an excellent site for rear guard action. Inland, the several rivers and numerous streams discharging into the bay helped turn the rain-sodden ground into one of the worst stretches of swampland in western New Britain. The Japanese knew that the Americans would have to advance up the coastal corridor and waited for them in prepared positions.

An enemy map of the point, captured on 3 January, showed machine gun emplacements and rifle pits sufficient to hold a reinforced platoon located there. When a patrol started out to check the point on 20 January, there was a strong possibility that the Japanese might be holding it. Still, the shore of Borgen Bay east of Hill 660, was sprinkled with abandoned positions and these might also be vacant. When the patrol, most of Company A, 1/5, led by regimental scouts, reached the estuary that cut into the base of the point, all doubts were dispelled. Automatic weapons fire lashed across the water and forced the Marines to take cover. For two hours, the patrol's supporting mortars and machine guns sought to silence the enemy guns, but to no avail. Finally, because ammunition was getting low, artillery fire was called down to cover the Marines' withdrawal.

On the 21st, the 75mm howitzers of 1/11 fired on the suspected locations of the enemy weapons, and, on the following morning, a reinforced company tried to attack but could make no headway. A platoon that worked its way through the swamp to come up on the east side of the point

PATROL OF MARINES *seeking Japanese troops retreating from western New Britain files across one of the many jungle streams in the Borgen Bay area.* (*USMC 72282*)

ARMY AMPHIBIAN ENGINEERS *and Marines load Army LCMs at Iboki on 5 March for the overnight run to Talasea.* (*USMC 79887*)

spotted positions that appeared to hold a company and then pulled back. Ten enemy soldiers were killed and several wounded in the day's exchange of fire, most of these when the patrol, on its first approach, caught the crew of a strongpoint unawares. All through the night, artillery harassed the Japanese on the point, and, at 0910 in the morning, a squadron of A–20s appeared from Finschhafen to bomb and strafe ahead of a two-company attack supported by tanks.

The tanks, mediums of Company A, were transported across the bay by LCM to a beach about a thousand yards from the point and then lumbered up to lend supporting fire to the infantry assault. From offshore, a rocket DUKW laid down a barrage on the Japanese positions, and 1/11 fired in advance of the Marine skirmish line. In a series of short, violent fights, the Japanese were killed or driven from their defenses. In late afternoon, when Natamo Point was securely in American hands, the bodies of 30 enemy soldiers were counted in and around the wrecked and smoking gun pits. Some 15–20 machine guns and two 20mm cannons were destroyed in the day's action. A Japanese 75mm gun located somewhere in the jungle to the southeast of the point started firing late in the afternoon, but 48 rounds in reply from a 155mm seacoast artillery battery located in the beachhead silenced the piece.[21]

About half of the hundred-man garrison of Natamo Point fled the Marines' final attack and escaped down the trail to Agulupella or across the Natamo River to the *53d Infantry's* positions on the eastern bank. In a follow-up advance on the 24th, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines accounted for 10 more of the enemy while clearing the track as far as the river. The explosion of small-arms, mortar, and artillery fire that greeted any attempt to cross brought an effective halt to the day's advance. For five days, the Natamo River marked the limit of the 5th Marines' advance to the east, as the Japanese held on tenaciously.

On 25 January, an attempt to land a rifle platoon, reinforced with a half track and machine guns, in a coconut grove about 300 yards east of the river was repulsed by heavy Japanese fire. Similarly, a lodgement on the east bank of the river could not be held in the face of overwhelming enemy resistance. Before attempting another frontal assault, patrols from 1/5 followed the river south to find a suitable crossing, but the swamps defeated their efforts. On the 27th, Company B followed the corduroyed trail that led to Nakarop from Natamo Point until a strong Japanese rear guard was encountered about 4,000 yards inland. In the resulting fire fight, the Marines had one man killed and three wounded; the enemy lost 15 soldiers but accomplished his mission of holding up the advance. On the 28th, the 1st Battalion, 5th, less Company B which remained to hold the lines along the Natamo, moved out along this trail with the mission of reaching Nakarop. This battalion, spurred on by reports of the action at Niapaua, made quick work of two rather feeble attempts to delay its progress and bivouacked three and a half miles inland, not far from its objective. But the next day's advance disclosed that the Japanese were gone.

Not only had the enemy disappeared from in front of the Marines working along the trails inland, but he had abandoned his positions guarding the Natamo's

[21] Seacoast Consolidated AR, dtd 23Jan44, in 12th DefBn WarD, Jan44.

west bank, too. Scouts who moved 2,000 yards upstream on the 30th, then forded the river, and came down on the opposite bank found the defenses deserted. On the 31st, a patrol crossed the river mouth and proceeded to Old Natamo; three Japanese who were found in a pillbox near the beach were killed, but no one else was sighted. One of Lieutenant Colonel Puller's patrols reached Kakumo on the same day. The natives told the Marines that the last Japanese had left the village heading east the previous day.

In its advance to the Natamo and movement down the trail to Nakarop, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines had had 6 men killed and 33 wounded. Estimated enemy dead among the rear-guard detachments was close to 75, and the wounded probably reached a similar figure. In military terms, the cost to the Japanese was negligible for the prize gained, time for the main body of the *Matsuda Force* to get well underway for Iboki, Talasea, and, eventually, Rabaul.

The next obvious step for the 1st Marine Division was aggressive pursuit of the retreating Japanese. Patrols of 2/1, attached to the 5th Marines, followed the coastal track as far as Namuramunga, reaching the village, which was seven miles from Old Natamo, on 2 February. Two other patrols of the 1st Marines' battalion cut directly through the jungle from the coast to find the Agulupella-Kakumo-Kokopo trail and establish conclusively the enemy withdrawal route. Only stragglers, sick and wounded men, were encountered by any of the patrols; the Japanese left behind were too weak from hunger to offer any resistance.[22]

On 3 February, General Rupertus conferred with General Krueger at Finschhafen to discuss further actions by the 1st Marine Division. Both field commanders reacted unfavorably to a directive from GHQ that had just arrived ordering a new Final Beachhead Line in western New Britain, one that would include all of Borgen Bay in the defended perimeter. The feeling among the staff at GHQ was that the new line would prevent the Japanese from returning and shelling the landing beaches supporting the growing airfield. Rupertus and Krueger, knowing that their current problem was not the return of the Japanese but the destruction of the troops that had fled, ignored the message, feeling that it was based on premises no longer valid. Instead, Rupertus was given the go-ahead signal for an immediate pursuit of the *Matsuda Force* as far as Iboki and alerted to Krueger's plan of continuing the advance to the Willaumez Peninsula and beyond.[23]

The 5th Marines got the mission of keeping the pressure on the retreating enemy

[22] During these pursuit operations, a platoon of the 12th Defense Battalion's 155mm guns was positioned within the Yellow Beach perimeter to fire as field artillery in support of 1/11. An air observer spotted "five to eight Japanese barges loading personnel at the eastern tip of Borgen Bay. This information was relayed to an OP on Target Hill and thence to the 155mm guns. These barges were taken under fire at maximum range of 19,200 yards. After adjustment and platoon 10 volleys, the air observer reported 'all barges damaged or sunk with many Japs struggling in the water.'" Col Thomas L. Randall comments on draft manuscript, included with MajGen James M. Masters, Sr., ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 2Jul62.

[23] ALAMO G–3 note on GHQ directive, dtd 2Feb44, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 19;* MajGen William H. Rupertus ltrs to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, dtd 4Feb44 and 18Feb44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC).

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and, if possible, cutting off and destroying some part of the Japanese force. A simultaneous overland and overwater advance was planned with the help of landing craft of the Army amphibian engineers. The division's Cub planes were to scout ahead of the advancing Marines, spotting suitable landing beaches and keeping tabs on the Japanese. The 5th Marines knew where the enemy was heading and the route he was taking, but the jungle shielded the troops from aerial observers. Under the circumstances, when the Japanese might easily be waiting in ambush for their pursuers, the Marine advance had to be both swift and cautious.

Bad weather was a frequent factor in holding up the LCM-borne phases of the 5th Marines' pursuit. Crashing surf denied the forward beaches to landing craft and placed the burden of catching up on the patrols operating along the coastal track. When the seas and the limited number of LCMs available permitted, large elements of Colonel Selden's unit were able to leap-frog the foot patrols and bite off 10- and 15-mile chunks of the coast at a time. Alternately in the lead, as the 5th moved east, were elements of the attached scout platoon from division tanks, men of the regiment's own intelligence section, and, often, a brace of Army scout dogs and their handlers, loaned for the operation. Kokopo, Gorissi, and Karai-ai were occupied in their turn, and in each village the natives told the same story—the Japanese were still ahead. Prisoners seized along the trail in the mop-up of stragglers confirmed the continued head start.

On the 24th, patrols from sea and land reached Iboki, fully expecting to encounter Japanese resistance at this primary supply base. But there were no enemy defending troops to be found, only sick and starving individuals who had fallen behind. The last cohesive unit of the *Matsuda Force*, the *51st Reconnaissance* rear guard, had passed through the village on the 16th.

Despite his disappointment at missing contact and visiting further destruction on the Japanese, Colonel Selden was able to view his regiment's accomplishment with some pride. On short notice, actually less than a day's warning, the 5th had started its 20-day trek and worked out a successful method of operation that made the best use of the men and transportation available. As Selden later summarized the effort, he had:

> . . . 5,000 men on this jaunt of sixty-odd miles over some of the worst jungle terrain in the world. We kept the Nips on the move by having fresh men out every morning. With few exceptions, men were not called upon to make marches on two successive days. After a one-day hike, they either remained at that camp for three or four days or made the next jump by LCMs.
>
> . . . To have accomplished my march four days prior to the deadline without loss or even having a man wounded was, in our estimation, quite a feat.[24]

ALLIED PROGRESS REPORT [25]

As the 5th Marines moved into a staging area at Iboki Plantation, the final arrangements for continuing the 1st Division's advance along New Britain's north coast were being made. General Krueger intended to make a landing on Willaumez

[24] MajGen John T. Selden ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 7Mar52.

[25] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ALAMO G–3 Jnl;* Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign;* Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul.*

Peninsula, secure it, and drive on for Cape Hoskins and the Japanese airfield there. The landing craft needed for the pending operation would be a mixed and scant force of Navy LCTs and Army LCMs. Most of the amphibious shipping available to Seventh Fleet was tied up in support of landings in the Admiralties.

The success of DEXTERITY was an influential factor in hastening the schedule of operations designed to isolate Rabaul. On 13 February, General MacArthur issued a directive calling for the seizure of Manus in the Admiralties and Kavieng on New Ireland with a probable target date of 1 April. There was strong sentiment at General Kenney's headquarters to slice the delay time and secure the enemy airfields in the Admiralties ahead of the projected D-Day, if the Japanese garrison appeared to be weak. Intensive aerial scouting convinced the Allied Air Forces leader that a reconnaissance in force into the Admiralties could be risked, and he was able to persuade General MacArthur to order the move. A reinforced squadron of the 1st Cavalry Division made the first exploratory landing on Los Negros Island on 29 February and, in a sense, caught a tiger by the tail. The Japanese garrison, much stronger than aerial reconnaissance had indicated, battled fiercely to throw the cavalrymen off the island. General MacArthur made the decision to reinforce the troops ashore rather than withdraw them, and throughout March, American soldiers in overwhelming strength poured into the Admiralties. The capture of two airfields and an excellent deep-water harbor in the islands had the effect of hastening the tempo of operations in the Southwest Pacific and forging an important link in the chain of Allied bases that ringed Rabaul.

So swift was the pace of advance in early 1944, that the strategic importance of Cape Gloucester's airfield shrank steadily while the engineers were still working to get it ready for use. The airfield site at Saidor, its seizure termed by MacArthur a vital "exploitation of the New Britain landings," [26] turned out to be usable by transports and other heavy aircraft several weeks before the runway at Cape Gloucester was ready for regular traffic. Captain Petras landed General Rupertus' plane on Airfield No. 2 on 28 January, and the first Army transport came down on the field on the 31st. Pierced steel planking was laid the whole length of the runway to overcome the effects of heavy rains, but the site was simply a poor one, and a staggering amount of work and materials would have to be devoted in an effort to make Cape Gloucester into a first-class airfield. The changing strategic situation made this task unnecessary. The 35th Fighter Squadron moved into the field on 13 February, while the aviation engineers were still fighting the cape's unsuitable terrain, and the 80th Squadron followed on the 23d. Within a month, recall orders had been issued for both units so that they might be committed in support of MacArthur's advance west along New Guinea's coast toward the Philippines.

Marine operations following the seizure of Cape Gloucester had strong overtones of an aggressive police of the area. The 1st Division's patrols pressing the retreating enemy toward the east made a clean sweep of stragglers at the same time they were trying to find and destroy elements of the main body of the *Matsuda Force.*

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[26] CinCSWPA msg to CG, ALAMO For, dtd 28Dec43, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 12.*

The bothersome problem presented by the hulking presence of Rooke Island close inshore to the airfield was taken care of by Company B of the 1st Marines. Landing from LCMs on 12 February, the company patrolled vigorously for a week and confirmed the finding by ALAMO scouts that the Japanese had pulled out. The garrison once considered for Rooke no longer seemed necessary, and the Marines returned to Cape Gloucester on the 20th. By the end of February, New Britain was clear of any effective Japanese force as far east as a line joining Iboki and Arawe.

Talasea and Beyond

RECALL TO RABAUL [1]

The Japanese commanders at Rabaul, General Imamura of *Eighth Area Army* and Admiral Kusaka of *Southeast Area Fleet*, were in an unenviable situation following the loss of Cape Gloucester. They knew that the defensive line toward which the *Matsuda Force* was retreating was untenable. The *17th Division* troops could, and would, undoubtedly, fight doggedly to hold the Allies at bay before Talasea and Cape Hoskins in the north and Gasmata in the south. The enemy's dwindling force of warships and transports could attempt sacrifice runs to keep supplies flowing to the soldiers, and the naval planes of the *Eleventh Air Fleet* could provide weak and sporadic support of the ground action. Not even these few ships and aircraft were to be available, however. The success of the American amphibious assault on Kwajalein prompted the retirement of the *Combined Fleet* from its suddenly vulnerable base at Truk, and the follow-up carrier strike of 16–17 February on Truk decided Admiral Koga to issue recall orders to all Japanese naval aircraft in the Southeast Area.[2]

Enemy interceptors made their last attempt to break up an Allied air attack on Rabaul on 19 February. On the 20th, the fields that ringed Blanche Bay were deserted, "not a single moveable plane remaining" [3] to contest control of the air. The harbor yawned empty too, with the hulks of sunken ships the only reminder of the bustling fleet that had once based there. The Japanese stronghold was forced to rely entirely on its ground garrison for defense. Imamura and Kusaka determined to make that defending force as strong as possible, adding to it every available soldier and sailor on New Britain.

On 23 February, orders to withdraw to Rabaul were received at *17th Division* headquarters at Malalia. General Sakai gladly dropped the plans he had been formulating for holding out against the oncoming Allied troops, for he fully appreciated how isolated and hopeless his fight would have been. In the stead of preparations for a last-ditch defense centered on positions at Cape Hoskins, Sakai began hastily figuring the moves that would get his command back to Rabaul in fighting shape. The *Matsuda Force* was his major problem. The lead section of the weary column of men staggering along towards Talasea was still two weeks' march from the Willaumez Peninsula.

Unless the Allies suddenly broke their pattern of pursuit and surged ahead of the retreating Japanese troops, Sakai could

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *Eighth Area Army Ops; 17th DivOps; 51st ReconRegt Diary; Komori Diary*; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

[2] *SE Area Nav Ops—III*, pp. 58–63.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

figure that most of the men en route would reach their objective. Supply dumps located along the withdrawal routes held enough rations to enable the strongest and best-led elements of the *Matsuda Force* to make good their escape. The sick and wounded who fell behind, who lacked the strength to keep up with the main body or even to fend for themselves, were doomed. The kindest fate that might befall them was capture by a Marine patrol. Often the near-naked, emaciated wretches whom the Americans found glassy-eyed and dazed along the trails had not the strength left to survive the trip to the coast. So tangled and rugged was the country through which the enemy columns struggled that scores of stragglers who died a few feet off the track where they had crawled to rest would have lain unnoted but for the unforgettable stench of human remains rotting in the jungle.

The route taken by the defeated Japanese troops after they passed through Iboki headed sharply inland, following the course of the Aria River for 12–14 miles and passing through the native villages of Taliwaga and Upmadung on the west bank and Bulawatni and Augitni on the east. From Augitni, where the trail used by the *Komori Force* to escape Arawe joined, the track headed northeast across mountain slopes and through extensive swamps fed by sluggish, wide, and deep rivers. Hitting the coast at Linga Linga Plantation, a straight-line distance of 35 miles from Iboki, the route crossed the formidable obstacle posed by the Kapaluk River and paralleled the shore to Kandoka at the neck of Willaumez Peninsula. Continuing along the peninsula coast to Garu, the trail then crossed a mountain saddle to the eastern shore at Kilu and turned south to Numundo Plantation. An alternative route from Kandoka to Numundo across the base of the peninsula lay through a 15-mile-wide morass that bulged along the course of the Kulu River. Once the Japanese reached Numundo Plantation, they could follow the coastline trail to the airdrome at Cape Hoskins, to Malalia just beyond, and eventually, with luck, to Rabaul.

The task of keeping the escape route open until the *Matsuda Force* had reached the comparative safety of Malalia was given to two units. The *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* performed the duties of rear guard, insuring the enemy withdrawal from contact, and the *Terunuma Force*, a composite battalion of the *54th Infantry*, held the Talasea area, with orders to defend it against Allied attacks. The delaying actions of Colonel Sato's reconnaissance unit in western New Britain gave General Matsuda the respite he needed to get his command underway to the east. If the *Terunuma Force* carried out its mission equally well, it would hold its positions long enough for the hundreds of survivors of the Cape Gloucester battle to reach the area east of the Willaumez Peninsula. The Japanese commanders considered that they had enough troops in the Cape Hoskins sector to require the Allies to mount a large-scale amphibious operation to take it. And barring such an effort, the *17th Division* was confident that it could pull back to Rabaul with many of its units still in fighting trim. General Sakai estimated that most of his combat troops would reach the stronghold by mid-April and all of the remaining cohesive outfits, including rear-guard detachments, would make it by the middle of May.

Not all the Japanese movement had to be accomplished on foot; there were enough barges available to move a good part of the heavy munitions at Gasmata and Cape Hoskins back to Rabaul. Sick and wounded men, who could not survive a land journey, were given priority in these craft. Some combat units were transported a portion of the way to their goal in overwater jumps from Malalia to Ulamona and then on to Toriu. The first village was a major barge base about 65 miles from Cape Hoskins, and the second, 30 miles farther east, was the terminus of a trail network which led to Rabaul through the mountains of Gazelle Peninsula. The *17th Division* planned that its components would move lightly armed, carrying little reserve ammunition and only a bare subsistence level of rations. If the Allies attempted to cut the retreat route, all available units would concentrate to wipe out the landing force.

Only a few Japanese craft were risked in the dangerous waters west of Willaumez Peninsula, and these were used, on 21 February, to carry *2d Battalion, 53d Infantry* remnants to Volupai, opposite Talasea on Willaumez. The battalion, with reinforcing artillery, was sent on ahead of the main body of the *Matsuda Force* to form the nucleus of a covering force at Ulamona. The barges returned once more to the Aria River before the Marines landed at Iboki and took out General Matsuda, members of his immediate staff, and all the litter patients they could carry. Matsuda was landed at Malalia on the 25th.

Carrying out his orders, Colonel Sato of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* saw the last march element of the *Matsuda Force* safely through Upmadung before starting his own unit on the trail. At Augitni, Sato met Major Komori who had brought his troops up from Arawe, and the two groups, both under Sato's command, began moving east on 6 March. On the same date, the leading elements of the *Matsuda Force* column reached the base of Willaumez Peninsula.

VOLUPAI LANDING [4]

The 6th of March was the landing date chosen for the APPEASE Operation—the assault and seizure of the Talasea area of Willaumez Peninsula by the 5th Marines, reinforced. The principal objective included several parts, the government station on the shore of Garua Harbor that gave its title to the whole region, an emergency landing ground nearby, grandly called Talasea Airdrome, and the harbor itself which took its name from Garua Island that formed one of its arms. The landing beach, Red Beach, lay directly across the peninsula from Garua Harbor in the curve of a shallow bay at Volupai. The isthmus connecting the two points, 2½ miles apart, is the narrowest part of the peninsula. (See Map 30.)

Several plantations, one on Garua Island and the others at Volupai on the west coast and Santa Monica, Walindi, and Nu-

[4] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: 1st MarDiv SAR, APPEASE Op, n.d., hereafter *APPEASE SAR;* ATIS Item No. 10443, Talasea Force Personnel Chart, dtd 4Mar44, in ATIS Bul No. 881, dtd 3Apr44 (ACSI Recs FRC, Alex); OCE, GHQ, AFP, *Amphibian Engineers*; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign;* Col Robert Amory, Jr., AUS, and Capt Ruben M. Waterman, AUS, eds., *Surf and Sand, The Saga of the 553d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment and 1461st Engineer Maintenance Company 1942–1945* (Andover, Mass.: The Andover Press, Ltd., 1947), hereafter Amory and Waterman, *Surf and Sand.*

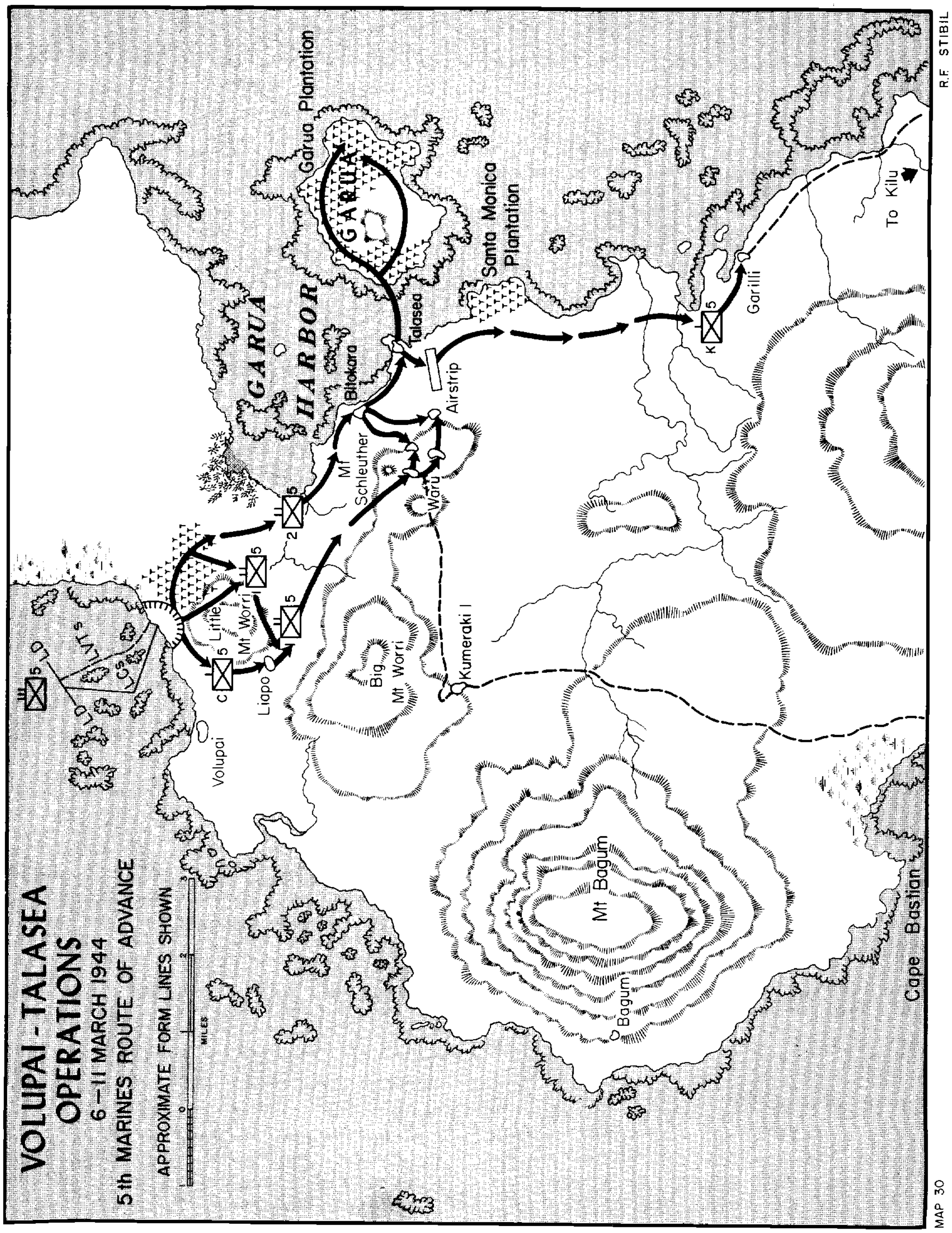
mundo on the eastern shore, had the only easily traveled ground on Willaumez. The terrain of the rest of the peninsula followed the general pattern of New Britain, mountains and high ground inland covered by rain forest, with foothills and coastal flats choked with swamp forest, secondary growth, and sprawling swamps along the course of the many rain-swollen rivers and streams. Above the isthmus between Volupai and Garua Harbor, the peninsula was little used by the natives or the Japanese because of impassable terrain. Below the narrow neck of land, much of it occupied by Volupai Plantation, there were a number of native villages along the coast and on mountain tablelands. A cluster of four called the Waru villages, about 1,500 yards west of Talasea, and Bitokara village, the same distance northwest of the government station, figured as intermediate objectives in 5th Marines' operation plans.

Red Beach was a 350-yard-wide corridor opening to Volupai Plantation, 400 yards inland; on its northern flank the beach was bordered by a swamp, to the south a cliff loomed over the sand. The cliff was part of the northwest slopes of Little Mt. Worri, a 1,360-foot peak that was overshadowed by 300 feet by its neighbor to the south, Big Mt. Worri. The eastern extension of Big Mt. Worri's ridgeline included Mt. Schleuther (1,130 feet) which dominated Bitokara, Talasea, and the Waru Villages. The trail from Volupai to Bitokara, which was to be the 5th Marines' axis of advance, skirted the base of these heights.

The major obstacle to the proposed landing at Volupai was the reef that extended 3,000 yards out from shore. Obviously impractical as the route for assault waves was the tortuous small-boat passage which wound through the coral formations. To make this narrow waterway safe for supply craft and support troops, the first Marines on Red Beach would have to land from LVTs which could ignore the reef and churn straight on to the beach from the line of departure. The 1st Marine Division would provide the tractors, the Seventh Fleet their transport and escort to the target, and the Army amphibian engineers all the rest of the landing craft needed. An Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Amory, Jr., would command all shipping during the movement to the objective and the landing.

The understrength company of LCVPs and LCMs that had supported BACKHANDER Force since D-Day could handle some portion of the load in the coming operation, but more engineer boats were needed. As early as 4 February, ALAMO Force alerted the Boat Battalion of the 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment to a probable role in the coming operation. The 533d, a unit of the 3d Engineer Special Brigade, was newly arrived in the forward area and as yet untested in combat. Elements of the boat battalion headquarters, a boat company, a shore company, and a maintenance detachment, all under command of Lieutenant Colonel Amory, were detailed to the job. From Goodenough Island, the engineers and their equipment moved to Finschhafen, and, on 27 February, the advance echelon embarked in its own boats for the 85-mile run to Borgen Bay.

The soldier boatmen made their landfall late at night after a day-long passage through choppy seas, but they got no chance to explore the bivouac area, "in the least atrocious of the various swamps


VOLUPAI - TALASEA OPERATIONS
6–11 MARCH 1944
5th MARINES ROUTE OF ADVANCE
APPROXIMATE FORM LINES SHOWN
MILES
GARUA HARBOR
GARUA
Garua Plantation
Santa Monica Plantation
Talasea
Bitokara
Airstrip
Mt Schleuther
Waru
Little Mt Worri
Big Mt Worri
Liapo
Volupai
Kumeraki I
Garilli
To Kilu
Mt Bagum
Bagum
Cape Bastian
LVTs
LCs
R.F. STIBIL
MAP 30

available," [5] which had been tentatively set aside for them. "Instead," the unit's history relates, "one of the worst 'rat races' of all times was to occupy every minute of every 24 hours for the next week." [6] This period of furious but ordered activity saw the movement of the 5th Marines and all its reinforcing units to Iboki, together with 20-days' supplies for the nearly 5,000 men of the APPEASE task force. Concurrently, the few dozen landing craft available had to be used to transport the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines to Iboki, where it could take over patrol missions from the 5th and be available as a reserve if the APPEASE operation demanded.

While the landing force assembled at its staging point, scouts tried several times to land on Willaumez Peninsula to determine the location and strength of enemy defending forces. Moving at night in torpedo boats, the men were turned back by high seas on one occasion and on another by a sighting of troops moving in the proposed landing area. Finally, early on 3 March, Australian Flight Lieutenant G. H. Rodney Marsland, who had managed Santa Monica plantation before the war, the 1st Division's chief scout, Lieutenant Bradbeer, and two natives landed near Bagum village about nine miles from Volupai. Setting up in the village, the party sent runners out to contact key natives known to Marsland and discover the Japanese dispositions. After nearly 24 hours ashore, the scouts withdrew with some useful information on the location and size of various enemy detachments, but they had surprisingly received no report of the major enemy concentration in the immediate Talasea area.[7]

Defending Willaumez Peninsula was a garrison of 595 men, some 430 of them concentrated in the vicinity of Talasea. A Japanese muster roll, completed at the same time the BACKHANDER scouts were ashore, agreed very closely with the information that was reported to the 5th Marines at Iboki. Volupai had only a rifle platoon and a machine gun squad to defend the beach, 28 men in all, but the bulk of the enemy force was within easy reinforcing distance. The Japanese, all under Captain Kiyomatsu Terunuma, commander of the *1st Battalion, 54th Infantry*, consisted of most of that unit,[8] plus the *7th Company* of the *2d Battalion, 54th*, the *9th Battery, 23d Field Artillery*, a platoon of machine guns, and a platoon of 90mm mortars. Terunuma's orders were to hold his positions north of Kilu and the Walindi Plantation and not to retreat without permission of the *17th Division* commander.

The 5th Marines had no indication that Red Beach was heavily defended; the natives reported that the area was not fortified, and aerial reconnaissance appeared to confirm this intelligence. Support for the APPEASE landing was therefore not overwhelming, but it was adequate for the job at hand. For three days prior to D-Day, Australian Beaufort squadrons based at Kiriwina Island flew bombing and strafing missions against targets in the Talasea and Cape Hoskins vicinity, and, on D-Day, the RAAF planes were to provide cover for the attack flotilla and to

[5] Amory and Waterman, *Surf and Sand*, p. 77.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[7] 1stLt John D. Bradbeer Rept on Talasea Recon, dtd 4Mar44, in PhibRecon PtlRepts, Cape Gloucester and Talasea, 11Oct43–9Mar44.
[8] *Japanese comments.*

blast Red Beach ahead of the assault waves. To make up for the absence of naval gunfire support, the 1st Division came up with its own brand of gunboats—medium tanks in LCMs. Four Shermans were added to the platoon of light tanks attached to the 5th Marines to provide the necessary firepower. Tests of the novel means of shelling the beach were made at Iboki to make sure that the tanks could fire from their seagoing gun platforms. The accuracy of the practice firing with 75mm cannon was nothing to boast about,[9] but the makeshift gunboats proved to be practical.

The operation plan of the 5th Marines called for the 1st Battalion, embarked in LVTs, to land in assault and secure a beachhead line which passed through the edge of Volupai plantation. The 2d Battalion, following directly behind in LCMs and LCVPs, was to pass through the 1st's positions and attack up the trail to Bitokara to seize the Talasea area. Two batteries of 75mm pack howitzers of 2/11 were to follow the assault battalions ashore on 6 March to furnish artillery support for the attack across the peninsula. On D plus 1, the 5th's 3d Battalion and reserve elements of the regiment's reinforcing units would move to Red Beach in landing craft which had returned from Willaumez.

Shortly before the APPEASE operation got underway, the 5th Marines got a new commander, Colonel Oliver P. Smith, who had just reported to the division. Colonel Selden stepped up to division chief of staff, replacing Smith who held the position briefly following his arrival on New Britain. A number of experienced senior officers, including Colonel Amor L. Sims, who had been chief of staff, and Colonel Pollock, the D–3, had returned to the States in February to fill key assignments in the continuing build-up of the Marine Corps for the Pacific War. Two of the 5th's battalions also had comparatively new commanders. Major Gordon D. Gayle, who led 2/5, had taken over when Lieutenant Colonel Walt was promoted to regimental executive officer; Lieutenant Colonel Harold O. Deakin, who had the 3d Battalion, assumed command after the battle for Aogiri Ridge was successfully concluded.

The invasion convoy that assembled off Iboki on 5 March for the 57-mile-long run to Volupai included 38 LCMs, 17 LCVPs, 5 LCTs, and 5 MTBs. Each of the Navy's LCTs carried five tractors of Company B, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, and the Marines of 1/5 who would ride them. The torpedo boats were under orders to escort the LCTs, as naval officers were dubious about risking their valuable landing craft in poorly charted waters without adequate communications or proper navigational guides. If anything, the engineer coxswains of Amory's command had more to worry about than the sailors, for their boats were a good bit more thin-skinned than the LCTs, and they would be moving at night through strange waters abounding in coral outcroppings.

Men of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 5th Marines and the regiment's various reinforcing elements began loading their boats at 1300, and, at 2200, the convoy departed, carrying more than 3,000 men and 1,000 tons of equipment. Lieutenant Colonel Amory later categorized his motley convoy as "probably the war's out-

[9] LtCol Rowland L. Hall comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 27Mar52.

standing example of overloading small boats," [10] but the movement to the target came off without a major hitch despite heavy rain squalls that struck shortly after midnight and continued for two hours.

There was one mishap en route with potentially serious consequences, but the lack of determined opposition at Red Beach negated its effect. The boat carrying the Army air liaison party attached to the landing force broke down early in the movement, and Major Gayle's boat, which was proceeding independently after a late start, took the crippled craft in tow. Gayle was reluctant to delay his own progress, but considered the liaison group's radios to be of vital importance in contacting supporting air units. As a result of his prudent action, the 2/5 commander arrived off Volupai after his battalion had begun landing, but its executive officer, Major Charles R. Baker, was fully in control.

The convoy of small craft arrived at its appointed place about 3½ miles off the coast at Volupai as dawn was breaking on D-Day. The LCTs closed slowly toward the reef as the Marines looked anxiously skyward for the planes which were supposed to be flashing in to hit the possible enemy positions at Red Beach. None of the RAAF Beauforts appeared, as their fields on Kiriwina were weathered in,[11] and the troops became more and more conscious of their exposure to an unknown enemy waiting on the silent shore. Lieutenant Colonel Amory, from his LCVP at the head of the line of landing craft, radioed Colonel Smith, "Shall we proceed despite air failure," and the landing force commander replied immediately, "Carry on." [12]

At 0825, on Amory's signal, the LCTs lowered their ramps and the LVTs of the first two waves roared into the water and on across the reef. As the tractors started toward the beach, Amory led a boat loaded with navigation buoys and two of the tank gunboats into the coral-free lane that aerial photos showed led to the beach. At the same time, on the opposite (left) flank of the line of departure, the other pair of tanks in LCMs started shoreward, keeping pace with the LVTs for as long as the irregular coral formations would permit. Standing on the bow of his boat, Amory with Flight Lieutenant Marsland at his side, conned the craft through the open water passage while the trailing LCVP dropped buoys to guide the third and succeeding waves of the landing force. The route that had to be used ran 45 degrees to the right of the path the tractors were following over the reefs until it got within 75 yards of the shore, where it "swung sharply to the left to coast six tenths of a mile just barely outside the overhanging trees to the beach at Volupai Plantation." [13]

The tanks opened fire with their machine guns to cover the approach of the

[10] Amory and Waterman, *Sand and Surf*, p. 84. The regiment was fully aware of the overloading but had no alternative. Since there was no follow-up shipping, "resupply could only be accomplished by returning the landing craft used in the assault to Iboki to reload. The Landing Force could, therefore, expect no additional supplies for over 24 hours after landing. The supplies accompanying the Landing Force were increased accordingly." Gen Oliver P. Smith memo to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 7Jun62.

[11] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 344.

[12] LtCol Robert Amory, Jr., MassNatGrd, ltr to CMC, dtd 25Mar52, including extract from his personal diary for 6Mar44.

[13] *Ibid.*

tractors to the beach, reserving their 75s for any Japanese return fire. The spray of bullets from all the American landing craft, for the LCVPs and the LVTs fired as well, was finally answered by a few scattered shots from the featureless jungle, and then mortar shells began falling amidst the oncoming tractors. At this moment, the assault troops got all the close air support that the 5th Marines received on D-Day, and that from an unexpected source—a Piper Cub circling overhead, with Captain Petras as pilot and Brigadier General David A. D. Ogden, Commanding General, 3d Engineer Special Brigade, as observer. Petras, when he saw the shell bursts, turned his tiny plane in over the tree-tops and started dropping the 25–30 hand grenades he carried on "any of the spots where it looked like there might be some Japs." [14] The results of the impromptu bombing were never checked, but the gallant effort drew considerable praise from the men who witnessed it.

At 0835, the LVTs crawled onto the beach, and the Marines of 1/5's assault platoons clambered over the sides and began advancing cautiously inland. There was little opposition from enemy infantry at first, but mortar rounds continued to fall, with most of them hitting out in the water where the columns of landing boat waves were beginning to thread their way through the buoyed channel. After Lieutenant Colonel Amory waved the tank-LCMs in for a landing, he proceeded out into the narrow passageway to act as control officer to keep the boats from swamping the limited capacity of the beach. After untangling a snarl of landing craft that occurred when the third wave tried to follow the tractors rather than the marked passage, the Army officer spent the morning directing traffic at the corner where the channel turned to parallel the shore.

Major Barba's two assault companies had little difficulty reaching their assigned objective. Company B encountered the only resistance, a small pocket of enemy riflemen it wiped out as it skirted the edge of the swamp that came right up to the northern edge of the Volupai-Bitokara track. Following his orders, Barba established a beachhead perimeter 200 yards inland and dispatched combat patrols to the flanks of his position as he waited for 2/5 to land and pass through his lines.

Immediately after the first tractors touched down on dry land, a reinforced platoon of 1/5 was sent up the slopes of Little Mt. Worri to eliminate an enemy machine gun nest. The existence of the position had been disclosed to the Marsland-Bradbeer scouting party by the natives. When the patrol found the emplacement, which commanded a good field of fire on the beach, it was abandoned. Pushing on through the thick undergrowth, the Marines sighted and engaged a group of enemy soldiers carrying a machine gun down the mountain toward Volupai Plantation.[15] Japanese resistance stiffened appreciably as the 1/5 patrol neared the coconut groves; in the exchange of fire the Marines accounted for a dozen enemy and lost one man killed and another wounded. The patrol leader called for another platoon to help him destroy the position he had developed, but

[14] Maj Theodore A. Petras interview by HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 11Apr50, p. 7.

[15] Col William H. Barba comments on draft of Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign*, dtd 24Mar52.

was given orders to hold up where he was until the 2d Battalion arrived on the scene.

The limited area for maneuver directly behind Red Beach and the narrow passage that had to be used to reach the shore slowed unloading appreciably. When Major Gayle reached the seaward end of the channel at 1230, reserve elements of his battalion were still landing, as were the firing batteries of Major Noah P. Wood, Jr.'s 2/11, carried in the LCMs of the last two waves. Company E of 2/5 had already passed through the 1st Battalion's lines at 1100 and run up against the enemy strongpoint located by the 1/5 patrol earlier in the morning.

Three of the medium tanks which had furnished the naval gunfire for the assault landing came up the trail to support Company E in its attack; the fourth tank was bogged down in soft ground at the beach. When the lead Sherman opened fire on the Japanese, it quickly silenced a machine gun that had been holding up the infantry. Then, as the big machine ground ahead on the mud-slickened track, enemy soldiers leaped out of the brush on either flank and attempted to attach magnetic mines to its sides. One man was shot down immediately by covering infantry; the other succeeded in planting his mine and died in its resulting blast, taking with him a Marine who had tried to stop the contact. The mine jammed the tank's turret and momentarily stunned the crew; luckily, the Marines inside also escaped injury from an antitank grenade that hit and penetrated the turret at about the same time. The damaged tank pulled off the trail to let the following armor come through and lead Company E's assault. Later, when the tank attempted to move on up the trail, it exploded a mine that smashed one of its bogie wheels. The presence of land mines resulted in a hurry-up call to division for detectors.

Rooting out the enemy from his trenches and emplacements on the edge of the coconut plantation, the tank-infantry team crushed the opposition and moved ahead with 1/5's 81mm mortars dropping concentrations on any likely obstacle in the way. As Gayle took command of the attack, the Marines had a much clearer idea of what they were going to run up against. At the height of the battle for the enemy position, a map showing the defenses of the Talasea area had been found on the body of a Japanese officer, and, as happened so many times on New Britain, intelligence indoctrination paid off. The document was immediately turned in, not pocketed as a souvenir, and, by 1300, the regimental intelligence section was distributing translated copies.

Once it had passed the Japanese defenses near the beach, the 2d Battalion, with Company E following the track and Company G moving along the mountain slopes on the right flank, made rapid progress through the plantation. At about 1500, five P–39s of the 82d Reconnaissance Squadron at Cape Gloucester flew over the peninsula, but could not locate the Marine front lines, so they dropped their bombs on Cape Hoskins instead.[16] At dusk, Major Gayle ordered his two assault companies to dig in for all-around defense,

[16] 1st MarDiv D–2 Jnl, entry at 1932, 6Mar44. Although this message, which calls the planes P–38s, does not denote the squadron or its location, the operation plan states that four "P–39s" would be on standby at Gloucester. Army Air Forces squadron records at Maxwell Field show that the 82d, which was staging at Cape Gloucester, bombed enemy installations at Cape Hos-

while he set up with his headquarters and reserve in a separate perimeter at the enemy position that had been reduced during the day's fighting. The 2d Battalion, 11th Marines had registered its batteries during the afternoon, and the pack howitzers now fired harassing missions through the night to discourage any counterattacks from forming.

The artillery had taken a beating from the Japanese mortars during the day, as the enemy 90mm shells exploded all over the crowded beach area. Some of the 75s had to set up almost at the water's edge so that they could have an unmasked field of fire. Corpsmen going to the aid of artillerymen who were hit while unloading and moving into position all too often became casualties themselves. During the action on 6 March, the 5th Marines and its supporting elements lost 13 men killed and 71 wounded; 9 of the Marines who died and 29 of those who were wounded were members of 2/11. Fifty of the regiment's seriously wounded men were loaded in an LCM and sent back to Iboki at 1830. The toll of counted enemy dead was 35; if there were Japanese wounded, they were evacuated by the elements of the *Terunuma Force* that had pulled back as 2/5 advanced.

Colonel Smith could count his regiment well established ashore at the end of D-Day. In the next day's attack, he planned to keep pressure on the Japanese, not only along the vital cross-peninsula track, but also in the mountains that overshadowed it. Captain Terunuma, in his turn, was ordering the moves that would stave off the Marine advance and protect the elements of the *Matsuda Force* which were just starting to cross the base of the peninsula.

SECURING TALASEA [17]

To reinforce the shattered remnants of the small Volupai area garrison which had made a hopeless attempt to stem the Marine advance, Terunuma sent his *4th Company*, reinforced with machine guns and mortars, "to check the enemy's attack." [18] At dawn on 7 March, patrols from 2/5 scouting the trail to Bitokara found the Japanese dug in not 50 yards from the Marines' forward foxholes. When Major Gayle's assault company (E) led off the morning's attack, the enemy entrenchments were found deserted. One of the deadly 90mm mortars was captured intact with shellholes from 2/11's fire as close as five feet to its emplacement. Passing swiftly through the abandoned hasty defenses, the 2d Battalion pressed on towards the coast with patrols ranging the foothills that dominated the trail. As Gayle's advance guard neared Mt. Schleuther just before noon, elements of the *4th Company, 54th Infantry* swept the track clear with a deadly concentration of fire. It was soon evident that the Japanese force, which was holding a position on the northwest slopes of the mountain, was too strong to be brushed aside. The pattern of enemy fire, in fact, showed that the Japanese were

kins between 1345 and 1430. The 80th Fighter Squadron, part of Gloucester's regular complement, filled in for the missing RAAF planes and dispatched P–38s over Talasea at 1055, 1110, and 1535; none of the Lightnings attacked ground targets. Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF HistDiv, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, dtd 19Jun62.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *APPEASE SAR; 17th Div Ops;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

[18] ATIS Item No. 10,441, Talasea Garrison Unit OpO No. 42, dtd 7Mar44, in ATIS Bul No. 881, dtd 3Apr44 (ACSI Recs, FRC Alex).

moving to outflank the Marines below and cut them off from the rest of the battalion column.

While Company E built up a strong firing line amid the dripping undergrowth along the trail, Major Gayle sent Company F directly up the steep slopes to hit the enemy troops trying to push west. Moving forward behind artillery and mortar supporting fires, the 2d Battalion Marines beat the Japanese to the dominant ground in the area and drove the losers back with heavy casualties. Coming up on the extreme right of Company F's position, a supporting weapons platoon surprised a machine gun crew setting up, wiped out the luckless enemy, and turned the gun on the retreating Japanese. As the firing died away, the bodies of 40 enemy soldiers testified to the fury of the action. For night security, 2/5 organized a perimeter encompassing its holding on Mt. Schleuther and the track to Bitokara.

Colonel Smith's attack on 7 March was to have been a two-pronged affair with 2/5 moving along the main trail and 1/5 heading into the mountain mass toward the village of Liapo behind Little Mt. Worri and then east to the Waru villages, believed to be the center of enemy resistance. The plan depended upon the 3d Battalion's arrival early on D plus 1 to take over defense of the beachhead. Lieutenant Colonel Deakin had orders to board the landing craft returning from Volupai and make a night passage to Red Beach to be on hand at daybreak to relieve the 1st Battalion. General Rupertus, who was present at Iboki, countermanded the order and directed that no boats leave until after dawn on 7 March. The result of this unexpected change of plans, made to lessen the risk in transit through uncharted waters, was that 3/5 arrived at Volupai late in the afternoon.

After it became clear the reserve would be delayed, a reinforced company of the 1st Battalion was started inland for Liapo to pave the way for the next day's operations. When the trail disappeared in a clutter of secondary growth, the company hacked its way onward on a compass course, but ended the tiring advance some distance short of the target. The approach of darkness prompted the isolated Marine unit to set up in perimeter defense. The night passed without incident.

On 8 March, Major Barba's battalion, moving to the east of Little Mt. Worri, started toward Liapo along two separate paths. Unfortunately, a native guide, dressed in cast-off Japanese clothing, leading a column headed by Company B, was mistaken for the enemy by a similar Company A column. In the brief outburst of fire that followed the unexpected encounter, one man was killed and several others wounded. Shortly afterwards, near Liapo, the battalion found the east-west trail it was seeking and joined the company that had spent the night in the jungle. Although it encountered no Japanese opposition as it moved towards its objective during the remainder of the day's advance, 1/5 found the rugged terrain a formidable obstacle. The men climbed and slid through numerous ravines and beat aside the clinging brush that often obscured the trace of the path they were following. At nightfall, Barba's units set up in defense a few hundred yards short of their goal.

Major Gayle's battalion had a hard time with both enemy and terrain on 8 March, but not until it had seized a sizeable chunk of the regiment's primary objective. A

patrol out at daybreak found the last known position of the Japanese manned only by the dead: 12 soldiers, most of them victims of American artillery and mortar fire. Another patrol discovered a sizeable enemy force 500 yards ahead at Bitokara, and Gayle readied a full-strength attack. When the battalion jumped off, with assault platoons converging from the foothills and the track, it found that the Japanese had pulled out again. Bitokara was occupied early in the afternoon, and scouts were dispatched along the shore to Talasea. Again there was plenty of evidence of recent enemy occupation but no opposition. Taking advantage of the situation, Gayle sent Company F to occupy Talasea airdrome nearby.

Scouts who climbed the slopes of Mt. Schleuther, which looked down on Bitokara, soon found where some of the missing Japanese had gone. A well-intrenched enemy force was located on a prominent height that commanded the village, and Gayle made preparations to attack. At 1500, Company E, reinforced with heavy weapons, drove upward against increasing resistance. The fire of a 75mm mountain gun and a 90mm mortar, added to that from rifles and machine guns, stalled the Marines. After an hour's fighting, during which the company sustained 18 casualties, Gayle ordered it to withdraw to Bitokara for the night. When the Japanese began to pepper the village with 75mm rounds, concentrating their shelling on 81mm mortar positions near the battalion command post, Gayle called down artillery on the height. The American howitzers and mortars continued to work over the enemy position all night long.

At 0800 on the 9th, a coordinated attack by companies of both assault battalions was launched to clear Mt. Schleuther and capture the Waru Villages. The artillery and mortar concentrations that preceded the jump-off and the powerful infantry attack that followed hit empty air. One dead soldier and two stragglers were all that was left of the defending force that had fought so hard to hold the hill position on the previous afternoon. The prisoners stated that the main body of the *Terunuma Force* had moved south down the coast on the night of 7 March, leaving a 100-man rear guard to hold off the Marines. This last detachment had taken off in turn after beating back 2/5's attack on the 8th.

Patrols of the 5th Marines searched Garua Island and the entire objective area during the rest of the day and confirmed the fact that the Japanese had departed, leaving their heavy weapons behind. Colonel Smith moved the regimental command post to Bitokara during the afternoon and disposed his 1st Battalion around the Waru villages, the 2d at Talasea and the airdrome, and left the 3d to hold Red Beach. He then informed division that Talasea was secured, and that the 5th Marines would patrol Willaumez Peninsula to clear it of the enemy.

The end of Japanese resistance in the objective area gave the Marines use of an excellent harbor and brought a welcome end to use of Red Beach. Colonel Smith directed that all supply craft would land their cargoes at Talasea from 9 March onward. Marine pioneers and Army shore party engineers were ordered to improve the Volupai-Bitokara track enough to enable them to move all supplies and equipment to Talasea; the job took three days of hard work. The track was deep in mud from the effects of rain and heavy traffic

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as evidenced by three medium tanks trapped in its mire.

Amphibian tractors had again proved to be the only vehicles that could keep up with the Marine advance; 2/5 used the LVTs as mobile dumps to maintain adequate levels of ammunition and rations within effective supporting distance. When the occasion demanded, the tractors were used for casualty evacuation, too. Although the ride back to the beach was a rough one for a wounded man, it was far swifter than the rugged trip that faced him with stretcher bearers struggling through mud.

The cost of the four-day operation to the 5th Marines and its reinforcing units was 17 men killed and 114 wounded. The Japanese lost an estimated 150 men killed and an unknown number wounded. The fighting had been sporadic but sharp, and Captain Terunuma had engaged the Marines just enough to earn the time that the *Matsuda Force* remnants needed to escape. The retirement of the *Terunuma Force* was deliberate; at Garilli, four miles south of Talasea, the Japanese halted and dug in to await the Marines.

MOP-UP PATROLS [19]

When General Sakai issued his withdrawal orders for the various elements of the *17th Division*, he was quite anxious to recover the 1,200-man garrison of Garove Island. Until the Marines landed at Volupai, he was stymied in this wish by *Eighth Area Army's* desire to keep the island in use as a barge relay point. Once the Americans had established themselves on Willaumez Peninsula, Garove was no longer of any value to the Japanese.[20] Resolving to risk some of the few boats and landing craft that he had left to evacuate the garrison, Sakai ordered the *5th Sea Transport Battalion* to load as many men as could crowd aboard the three fishing vessels and the one sampan available and sail for Ulamona. (See Map 31.)

The jam-packed boats, carrying about 700 men, left Garove shortly after midnight on 6 March and reached Ulamona unscathed the next afternoon. On their return voyage that night, the boats were intercepted by American torpedo boats and sunk. Immediately, the commander of the *8th Shipping Engineers*, who was holding three large landing craft in reserve for this purpose at Malalia, sent them directly to the island to bring off the remainder of the garrison. The craft were discovered by torpedo boats and sunk after a running gun battle. Despite these losses, three more landing craft were sent to the island where they picked up 400 men and escaped to Rabaul without encountering any of the deadly torpedo boats or being spotted by Allied aircraft.

The waters around Willaumez Peninsula became increasingly unhealthy for the Japanese as the APPEASE Operation wore on. On the 9th of March, while an LCT carrying supplies to Talasea rounded the northern end of the peninsula, it sighted and shot up four barges lying ill-hidden amidst the overhanging foliage on

[19] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *APPEASE SAR; 17th Div Ops; 51st ReconRegt Diary; Komori Diary;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

[20] The 3d Battalion, 1st Marines was alerted for a possible landing on Garove, but scouts who went ashore there on 7 March discovered signs that a considerable garrison was still present and heavily armed. The 1st Division then abandoned the plan to seize the island, figuring the objective not worth its probable cost in casualties.

the shore. On the same day, LCMs ferrying Marine light tanks, which were a more seaworthy load than the Shermans, encountered a Japanese landing craft and drove it ashore with a torrent of 37mm canister and .30-caliber machine gun fire. The terrier-like torpedo boats were the major killers, however, and, after a patrol base was established in Garua Harbor on 26 March, the northern coast of New Britain as far east as Gazelle Peninsula was soon swept clean of enemy craft.

Before the torpedo boats were out in force, however, the Japanese managed to evacuate a considerable number of men from staging points at Malalia and Ulamona. Except for Colonel Sato's rear guard, most elements of the *17th Division* had reached Cape Hoskins by the end of March. Issuing parties, in the carefully laid-out ration depots along the coastal trail, doled out just enough food to keep the men moving east, and then folded up as the units designated for rear guard at Malalia, Ulamona, and Toriu came marching in.

The only good chance that the Marines at Talasea had of blocking the retreat of General Matsuda's depleted command was canceled out by the skillful delaying action of Captain Terunuma. A reconnaissance patrol discovered the Japanese position at Garilli on the 10th, and its destruction was a part of the mission given Company K, 3/5, when it moved out toward Numundo Plantation on the 11th. The company found that the enemy force had abandoned Garilli but was set up along the coastal trail about three miles farther south. The small-scale battle that ensued was the first of many in the next four days, as the Japanese blocked the Marines every few hundred yards and then withdrew before they could be badly hurt. An enemy 75mm gun, dragged along by its crew, helped defend the successive trail blocks and disrupted a number of attempts to rush the Japanese defenses.

Late on the 16th, Company K reached Kilu village and tangled with the *Terunuma Force* for the last time. As the Marines and the Japanese fought, an LCM carrying Lieutenant Colonel Deakin and an 81mm mortar section came through the fringing reef. The enemy artillery piece fired on the landing craft, but failed to score a hit. The arrival of the 81s appeared to turn the trick. As soon as the mortars started firing, Captain Terunuma's men broke contact and faded away.

On the 18th, Company K reached Numundo, and, on the 25th, the whole 2d Battalion outposted the plantation. Five days later, Major Gayle moved his unit to San Remo Plantation about five miles to the southeast and began patrolling west to the Kulu River and east as far as Buluma, a coastal village halfway to Hoskins airdrome. On the peninsula, 1/5 set up a strong ambush at Garu on the west coast. All units patrolled extensively, making repeated visits to native villages, checking the myriad of side trails leading off the main tracks, and actively seeking out the Japanese. Many stragglers were bagged, but only one organized remnant of the *Matsuda Force* was encountered in two months of searching. The task of destroying this unit, what was left of Colonel Sato's reconnaissance regiment, fell to 2/1.

The 1st Marines had the responsibility of maintaining a patrol base at Iboki and spreading a network of outposts and ambushes through the rugged coastal region. In mid-March, Marine and Army patrols both made the trip between Arawe and the

north coast, discovering and using the trails that the Japanese had followed. Sick and emaciated enemy fugitives were occasionally found, but the signs all pointed to the fact that those who could walk were now east of this once important boundary.

Only a few engineer boats could be spared from resupply activities for patrol work. These LCMs and LCVPs were used to transport strong units, usually reinforced platoons or small companies, to points like Linga Linga Plantation and Kandoka where the Japanese had maintained ration dumps. The lure of food was irresistible for the starving enemy troops stumbling through the jungle, and the Marines took advantage of the certainty that the Japanese would at least scout the vicinity of places where they had counted on finding rations.

Near Kandoka on 26 March, Colonel Sato's advance party ran head-on into a scout platoon from 2/1. The Japanese caught the Marine unit as it was crossing a stream and cut loose in a blaze of rifle and machine gun fire. For three hours, the Americans were pinned down on the stream banks before the arrival of another 2/1 patrol enabled them to withdraw; one Marine was killed and five wounded. Sato, who had several of his own men wounded in the fight, made the decision to bypass Kandoka and cut through the jungle south of the village. He ordered his men to strip themselves of everything but their weapons and ammunition for the push into the swamps at the base of Willaumez. On the 27th, Marine attempts to locate the Japanese column were unsuccessful, but the days of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment* were numbered.

While the head of Sato's column was nearing Kandoka, the tail was sighted at Linga Linga by one of the 1st Division's Cubs. The pilot, again the busy Captain Petras, was scouting a suitable landing beach for a large 2/1 patrol. After drawing a map that located the Japanese, he dropped it to the patrol and then guided the engineer coxswains into shore at the rear of the enemy positions. This time the Marines missed contact with Sato's force, but with the aid of the landing craft they were able to move freely along the coast as additional sightings pinned down the location of the enemy unit.

On 30 March, a small Marine patrol sighted Sato's rear guard, 73 men accompanied by the redoubtable enemy colonel himself, who was by this time a litter patient. Major Charles H. Brush, 2/1's executive officer, who was commanding patrol activities in the region, reacted quickly to the report of his scouts. Leaving a trail block force at Kandoka, he plunged into the jungle with the rest of the men available, roughly a reinforced platoon, to engage the Japanese. Shortly before Brush reached the scene, a six-man patrol under Sergeant Frank Chilek had intercepted the Sato column and brought it to a halt by sustained rifle fire. When Brush arrived, Chilek's unit was pulled back by his platoon leader, who had come up with a squad of reinforcements, so that the stronger Marine force would have a clear field of fire. The Japanese were wiped out, and, miraculously, not a Marine was harmed in the brief but furious battle. At least 55 Japanese were killed in one 100-yard stretch of trail, including Colonel Sato, who died sword in hand, cut down by Chilek's patrol.

A few elements of the enemy reconnaissance regiment, those near the head of its column, escaped from the battle on 30 March. Without the inspiration of Sato, however, the survivors fell apart as a unit and tried to make their way eastward as individuals and small groups. Most of these men died in the jungle, victims of malnutrition, disease, and the vicious terrain; others were killed or captured by Marine patrols and outposts.

The 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, operating out of its base at San Remo, accounted for many of these stragglers who blundered into ambushes set on the trails that led to Cape Hoskins. Major Komori, who had led the quixotic defense of an airfield no one wanted, was one of those who met his end in a flurry of fire at a 2/5 outpost.

The major, wracked with malaria, had fallen behind his unit, and, accompanied only by his executive officer and two enlisted men, had tried to struggle onward. On 9 April, a Marine outguard killed Komori and two of his party; the sole survivor was wounded and captured. The death of Major Komori brought to a symbolic end the Allied campaign to secure western New Britain.

Conclusion

RELIEF IN PLACE[1]

Navy and Marine Corps leaders were seriously concerned about the retention of the 1st Marine Division in the Southwest Pacific Area and particularly about its employment in a role that did not take full advantage of its training and experience.[2] Veteran amphibious divisions were scarce throughout the Pacific, and officers of the naval service felt that the shore-to-shore operations which General MacArthur had projected for the remainder of 1944 could be handled well by units that had not made a specialty of amphibious assault. In sharp contrast, the capture of the island targets of Admiral Nimitz' Central Pacific drive demanded trained amphibious divisions. To spearhead its long overwater advances and the unavoidable fierce contests to win secure beachheads, the Navy wanted Marine assault troops.

The allocation of troops to seize various Pacific objectives rested with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In Washington, the Commandant of the Marine Corps worked through Admiral King to get the 1st Marine Division back under naval command and employed to its full amphibious capability.[3] Neither General Vandegrift nor General Rupertus was convinced that pursuit of the remnants of the Japanese garrison of western New Britain was a task that made the best use of the division.[4] General MacArthur was reluctant to release the Marine unit to Pacific Ocean Areas' command, however, until operations to seize Kavieng and further isolate Rabaul were concluded.

During March, at a series of conferences in Washington attended by key representatives of both MacArthur's and Nimitz' staff, the conflicting points of view regarding the relative strength to be employed in the Central and Southwest Pacific offensives were aired. On the 12th, the Joint Chiefs directed CinCSWPA to complete the isolation of Rabaul with a minimum of forces and to bypass Kavieng, while he made his main thrust west along the New Guinea coast toward the Philippines. CinCPOA was ordered to seize positions in the southern Marianas in June and then to move on to the Palaus in Sep-

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *GHQ G–3 Jnl*, Mar–Apr 44; Isely and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*.

[2] In a marginal comment to a letter from General Rupertus, informing him that the 1st Marine Division might have to stay on New Britain for a considerable period of time, General Vandegrift noted: "Six months there and it will no longer be a well-trained amphibious division." MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, dtd 4Feb44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC).

[3] LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift ltr to LtGen Holland M. Smith, dtd 15Mar44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC).

[4] *Ibid.;* MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, dtd 18Feb44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC).

tember. The 1st Marine Division was to be returned to Nimitz' control for employment as an assault division in the Palaus operation.

The JCS left the negotiations regarding the actual redeployment of the 1st Division up to the two senior Pacific commanders. On 31 March, Nimitz radioed MacArthur asking that the division be disengaged as soon as possible and withdrawn to a base in the Solomons. In reply, the general stated that he thought that the division should not be relieved until late June and that when the relief took place it would require extensive use of amphibious equipment since there were no docks at Cape Gloucester. MacArthur indicated that in view of prospective operations in his area such equipment was not available to accomplish the relief.

On 6 April, both Marshall and Nimitz reminded MacArthur of the intended employment of the 1st Marine Division in the Palaus operation, and Nimitz stated that the division would have to be released prior to 1 June in order to "have ample time to prepare for participation in a major amphibious assault."[5] At the same time, Admiral Halsey was asked to determine to what extent his South Pacific Force could support the movement of troops involved. The Pacific Ocean Area's commander pointed out further that the timing and success of operations in the Palaus depended upon the planned use of the 1st Division, and that any delay in the completion of the campaign would "cause corresponding delays in the readiness of the Pacific Fleet"[6] to support MacArthur's operations.

[5] CinCPOA msg to CinCSWPA, dtd 6Apr44, in *GHQ G–3 Jnl*, 9Apr44.

[6] *Ibid.*

The reaction to the messages from Pearl Harbor and Washington was swift. By 8 April, arrangements had been made to relieve the 1st Marine Division with the 40th Infantry Division which was stationed on Guadalcanal. The movement was to be made in two echelons using transports belonging to Halsey's force. To speed the transfer and ease cargo space requirements, the two divisions were directed to exchange in place all equipment that was common to both or could be reasonably substituted therefor. The first elements of the 40th Division to arrive at New Britain would be utilized to relieve the Marines deployed in the Iboki and Talasea areas.

MARINE WITHDRAWAL[7]

Before the Army relief arrived, the 1st Marine Division had begun the inevitable aftermath of a combat operation—a new training cycle. On 17 March, General Rupertus issued a directive to all units at Cape Gloucester outlining a seven-week program of individual and organizational training which laid emphasis on firing practice and tactical exercises from the squad through the regiment. Colonel Smith was ordered to start a similar program for the 5th Marines at Talasea as soon as his situation permitted.

Word of the division's pending departure for the Solomons brought the training schedule to an end, but not before an amphibious reconnaissance school

[7] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: MIS, GHQ, FEC, Ops of the Allied IntelBu, GHQ, SWPA—v. IV, Intel Series, dtd 19Aug48; 40th InfDiv, Hist of BACKHANDER Op 28Apr–27Nov44, n.d. (WW II Recs Div, FRC Alex); *1st MarDiv Mar–May44 War Ds*; Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

graduated a class well-versed in the techniques painstakingly acquired by Lieutenant Bradbeer and the other veteran division scouts. Before the graduates returned to their units, they took part in an actual scouting mission to check the landing beaches and the airdrome on Cape Hoskins. On 13 April, a 16-man patrol landed from LCMs about 5,000 yards west of the enemy airfields and started for the objective. The scouts were split into three parties, one followed the shoreline, another the coastal trail, and the third circled inland.[8] As it approached Cape Hoskins, the center party ran into a Japanese ambush bristling with mortars and machine guns. Despite the enemy fire and a close pursuit, the various elements of the patrol were able to shake loose from contact, get back through the jungle to their rendezvous point, and withdraw without incurring any losses. The next American reconnaissance to Cape Hoskins was made on 7 May, and by the Army, but the Japanese encountered by the Marines, evidently a rear guard, had departed in the general retreat to Rabaul.

Major General Rapp Brush, commanding the 40th Division, flew to Cape Gloucester on 10 April to arrange for the relief in place of the 1st Marine Division by elements of his own unit. The first echelon of the Army division, principally the 185th Infantry and its reinforcing units, reached the cape on 23 April. On the following day, the 1st Marines and detachments from a number of division supporting units boarded the transports that had brought the soldiers and sailed for the South Pacific. The 185th, at the same time, crowded into engineer landing craft at Borgen Bay and sailed for Iboki. Stopping overnight at the plantation, the Army regiment moved on at dawn, leaving behind a platoon to replace a like detachment of the 5th Marines. On the 25th, the soldiers reached Willaumez and the Army commander took over responsibility for the area from Lieutenant Colonel Buse, who had taken command of the 5th Marines when Colonel Smith was promoted and returned to Cape Gloucester to become ADC.[9] The Marine regiment and its attached units boarded the LCMs and LCVPs that had brought their welcome relief force and started back for Cape Gloucester the following evening.

The remainder of the 40th Division arrived on 28 April, and General Rupertus turned over command of the BACKHANDER Force to General Brush. While Captain Petras flew the Marine leader back to the Solomons, the second echelon of the 1st Division loaded its gear and sailed. On 4 May, when the ships that had transported the first echelon returned, the last elements of the division departed. Only one Marine unit, the 12th Defense Battalion, remained at Cape Gloucester, but it too, was relieved later in the month when an antiaircraft artillery group arrived to take its place.[10]

The last group of ships returning to the Solomons joined LSTs carrying Compa-

[8] MajGen Oliver P. Smith ltr to CMC, dtd 31Mar52.

[9] Gen Oliver P. Smith memo to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 7Jun62.

[10] At one point in the relief of units, General MacArthur intended to retain the 19th Naval Construction Battalion in the Southwest Pacific, but Admiral Nimitz pointed out that the unit, serving as the 3d Battalion, 17th Marines, was organic to the 1st Division. ComSoPac disp to CinCPOA, dtd 14Apr44, and CinCPOA disp to CinCSWPA, dtd 17Apr44, in *GHQ G–3 File*, 18Apr44.

nies A and B, 1st Tank Battalion, and personnel of the division rear echelon who had closed out the Marine supply dumps on New Guinea. Company B had been released from the DIRECTOR Force in mid-April and sent to Finschhafen in anticipation of the 1st Marine Division's withdrawal. Company A, which had the only medium tanks available in the forward area, had been alerted for action in the Admiralties and was actually employed on 22 April as a part of the assault forces at Tanahmerah Bay in the Hollandia operation. A large swamp and a precipitous mountain range immediately behind it prevented the Marine tanks from moving inland, and while the Army infantrymen advanced, the Marines "sat on the beach, fished, and were eventually loaded aboard ship again." [11]

When the 1st Marine Division, reinforced, added up the cost of its four-month campaign on New Britain, the casualty total read 310 men killed or died of wounds and 1,083 wounded in action. The figures could easily have been higher had the operation not been well planned and skillfully executed by veteran troops. When General Rupertus relinquished command of BACKHANDER Force to General Brush, the toll of enemy killed and captured stood at 4,288 and 420, respectively.[12] In postwar calculations, a senior staff officer of *Eighth Area Army* reckoned the Japanese loss in the fighting at Arawe and Cape Gloucester and in the withdrawal to Rabaul at 3,868 killed and died of wounds.[13] It is probable that the actual total of enemy killed lay somewhere between the claim and the recollection.

The 40th Infantry Division had its first clash with the Japanese as soon as it relieved the 1st Division's advance posts. Following his orders from ALAMO Force, General Brush kept pressure on the *17th Division* stragglers and mopped up the few enemy troops that remained alive west of Rabaul. On 7 May, patrols of the 185th Infantry occupied Cape Hoskins airdrome and found the area mined but deserted. In June, a regiment of the 40th relieved the DIRECTOR Force at Arawe, and, in October, units of the division occupied Gasmata. Late in November, the Australian 5th Division relieved the 40th in its positions on New Britain, and the American unit moved west to take part in MacArthur's attack on Leyte.

In its seven months of active patrolling, the 40th Division killed 31 Japanese soldiers and took a mere 18 prisoners, proof enough that the enemy had successfully withdrawn his troops to Rabaul. Close to a thousand enemy were accounted for by natives roaming the jungle that ringed the Japanese stronghold. For self defense, the coastwatchers who manned the observation posts on Gazelle Peninsula and in the jungles to the east had to arm selected natives. An initial air drop of 100 riot guns and ammunition was made on 21 February and proved so worthwhile an idea that it was followed up repeatedly and to such effect that nothing short of all-out enemy retaliation sweeps could have stopped the slaughter. In time, the specter of bushy-haired Melanesians armed with shotgun and knife lying in ambush along every trail put a severe crimp in the aggressiveness of Japanese patrols ranging out from Rabaul.

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[11] Capt Howard R. Taylor ltr to HistDiv HQMC, dtd 6Jul51.

[12] *1st MarDiv Apr44 WarD*, entry of 28Apr44.

[13] *Eighth Area Army Ops*, p. 197.

CAMPAIGN APPRAISAL [14]

Many serious students of the Pacific War have questioned the selection of Cape Gloucester and Arawe as Allied objectives. In most cases, too little heed has been given to the commander's responsibility to approve operations that are within the reasonable capabilities of his forces. Observers who recognize that the men and munitions available to MacArthur and Nimitz were stretched thinly, argue that the Allies might have made bolder use of limited resources. The conclusion is inescapable that such judgments are based on a knowledge of results.

If, in retrospect, the landing at Saidor seems to have been a wiser move than that at Cape Gloucester, it should not be forgotten that the one was contingent upon the success of the other. If now Arawe's seizure appears to have been a fruitless effort, it did not appear so at the time to many responsible and intelligent men. Away from the pressure of war, it is not hard to see that many of the operations undertaken to reduce Rabaul were unnecessary. At the time, however, DEXTERITY objectives were vital in the opinion of the men who chose them.

In many respects, the seizure of Cape Gloucester was a model amphibious operation. The difficulties overcome in landing a large assault force on an obscure beach with numerous off-lying reefs were formidable. Excellent aerial photography by Allied Air Forces enabled Admiral Barbey's staff to prepare accurate navigational charts for the attack force. A careful plan, with adequate emergency safeguards to insure its execution, provided for essential minesweeping and buoying of boat lanes. Landing craft control procedures were well thought out, and a senior naval officer was made responsible for the safe passage of the craft through the reefs and on to the beaches.[15] Coxswains and wave officers were given panoramic sketches built up from maps and photographs to help them identify beaches as they were seen from boats approaching the shore.

Although there was no hitch in the landing operations at Cape Gloucester, and the Navy and Marine Corps worked together with practiced ease, MacArthur's headquarters realized that the problem of who was in overall control at the time of the landing had been left in the air. Naval amphibious doctrine clearly gave this responsibility to the attack force commander, and at the conclusion of DEXTERITY, GHQ adopted this concept of control for future operations in the Southwest Pacific. Landing force commanders would take charge when their troops were firmly established ashore.[16]

What Admiral Barbey called "the old problem of efficient joint planning" [17] was handled well in the preparations for DEXTERITY. The various staffs—ground, naval, and air—at GHQ and at operating forces levels coordinated their planning activities, and the operations, instructions, and plans that were issued reflected concurrent thinking. Conferences between interested commanders were fre-

[14] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *DEXTERITY Rept; ALAMO G–3 Jnl; VII PhibFor AR; 1st MarDiv SAR*, all phases and annexes; *APPEASE SAR;* Hough and Crown, *New Britain Campaign.*

[15] *VII PhibFor ComdHist*, p. II–47.

[16] MajGen Stephen J. Chamberlin, USA, memo for CinC, dtd 12Feb44, Subj: OpsInstns for Manus-Kavieng Ops, in *GHQ G–3 Jnl*, 13Feb44.

[17] *VII PhibFor AR*, p. 13.

quent enough to work out solutions to differences regarding objectives, forces available, and timing. The abandonment of Gasmata as a target, the substitution of Arawe, and the diversion of the Gasmata landing force to Saidor were all examples of the flexibility with which changes in the operational situation were met. The 1st Marine Division's strong views on the composition of the BACKHANDER assault force were carefully considered and finally accepted. The decision to cancel parachute troop participation and to strengthen the Marine landing force instead owed a great deal to the Commander, Allied Air Forces and his reluctance to support the air drop as planned.

General Kenney was much more interested in the aerial support that his bombing and attack squadrons could give to DEXTERITY operations than he was in the diversion of transports to a parachute landing. "Gloucesterizing" was an expression that came into use in the Fifth Air Force "to describe the complete obliteration of a target." [18] The word was invented by pilots as a tribute to the thoroughness of the pre-invasion aerial bombardment of Cape Gloucester. Japanese prisoners and captured diaries confirm the devastating effect of the steady hammering by Allied planes. Several hundred enemy troops lost their lives in the bombing and strafing attacks, and most of the permanent installations and fixed defenses near the airdrome were destroyed. Enemy morale skidded downward as antibarge strikes mounted in intensity and effectiveness with the approach of D-day, and the flow of supplies to the garrison of western New Britain dwindled.

The shortage of fire support ships, and the desire to conceal the chosen landing beaches from the enemy, limited naval gunfire preparations to the morning of the actual assault at both Cape Gloucester and Arawe. The featureless blanket of jungle growth crowding to the water's edge showed few targets that were suited to the flat trajectory of naval guns. Most of the ships' bombardment was confined to area fire which showered the airfield, the hills that broke through the jungle, and the ill-defined beaches. Opportunity targets, such as the anti-boat guns that ripped through the rubber boat formation at Arawe, were sure game for destroyers, but such targets were few.

To bridge the gap between the end of naval gunfire and air bombardment of the beaches and the grounding of the first assault wave, ship-launched rockets were called into play. Both Admirals Barbey and Kinkaid were impressed with the potential of the new weapon, but the lack of opposition to the BACKHANDER and DIRECTOR landings deferred an evaluation of its effect against a stoutly-defended shore. There appeared to be little doubt, however, that the rockets would be a welcome and standard addition to amphibious fire support.

The Yellow Beach assault marked the first time that smoke was used to screen a landing operation in the Southwest Pacific. General Rupertus was not in favor of its employment, arguing that the smoke, dust, and flying debris of the preliminary bombardment was enough to becloud the vision of enemy observers on Target Hill.[19] The Marine general anticipated what happened; the smoke laid by bombers drifted lazily across the land-

[18] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 345.

[19] *Pollock comments.*

ing lanes and obscured the beaches. Fortunately, as Admiral Barbey noted, "landing craft were handled boldly and successfully in it," [20] and the smoke cover was not a serious problem. The lack of Japanese opposition must have had a good bit to do with the VII Amphibious Force commander's belief that the smoke was valuable "in protecting landing craft during the later stages of their approach to the beach." [21] If supporting fires to destroy coast defense guns had been needed, ships' gunners and pilots overhead would have been hard put to locate targets in the thick fog of smoke that hid the coast.

The considerable problems, both logistical and tactical, that were presented by the unexpected swamp behind the Yellow Beaches were met with ingenuity and dispatch. Adapting the dump dispersal and ship unloading plan to the limited stretch of dry ground available, the shore party solved a snarl that might have stalled the entire operation. Mobile loading, which was a key feature of the supply plan for BACKHANDER, worked, but not without considerable difficulty. Much of the trouble that arose in the use of pre-loaded trucks came from the employment of inexperienced and ill-disciplined drivers for a job that demanded skill and individual responsibility. In assessing the operation, ALAMO Force commented that there had been a tendency at Cape Gloucester, common to most amphibious operations, to bring in more motor transport than could be efficiently used. The excess vehicles landed tended to clog the limited road net and delay rather than speed unloading operations.

The readiness of Marine pioneers to meet any crisis that cropped up reflected their sound training as the 1st Division's shore party. Rupertus gave the men well-earned praise for meeting the original supply schedules and told Krueger that "I have seen no finer performance of duty on any landing beach by any unit in my career." [22] The contrast with the diligent but slow unloading efforts by improvised and poorly trained shore parties at Tauali and Arawe was marked. Krueger, recognizing that "a highly trained and well equipped shore party is indispensable in any landing operation," used an amphibian engineer shore battalion at Saidor and recommended the use of similar units in any future operations.[23]

The Marine practice of carrying trained replacements into combat as part of the shore party proved itself again at Cape Gloucester. The 300 men that reinforced 2/17 were available as laborers on the beaches and in the dumps at a time when shore party manpower demands were highest. At night, the men joined the pioneers in backing up perimeter defenses and, when the situation demanded, filled in as casualty replacements in hard-hit combat units.

The shore party commander drew attention to the fact that the naval beach party had a good share of the success of unloading operations, noting:

> For the first time a Marine shore party had the benefit of a trained, permanently organized beach party as one of its reinforcing elements. This beach party concept was an innovation of VII Amphibious Force, and its personnel were made avail-

[20] *VII PhibFor AR*, p. 9.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen Walter A. Krueger, dtd 6Jan44, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 15.*
[23] *DEXTERITY Rept*, Encl 1, p. 3.

> able several weeks in advance of the landing. They lived and trained with the shore party of which they were a part and were lifted to Cape Gloucester with it. Here the means to control effectively the approach and beaching of landing ships and craft was conclusively demonstrated, and the performance of this beach party fully justified the high praise bestowed by Rupertus.[24]

Although the 1st Marine Division had its own shore party, it did not have an organic unit to provide the services of another element of the amphibian engineers, the boat battalion. In a role particularly well adapted to the shore-to-shore operations of the Southwest Pacific Area, the Army-manned small craft proved themselves a valuable addition to the BACKHANDER Force. In an analysis of their worth, the boat group commander at Talasea noted:

> . . . the First Marine Division maintained actual operational command over a substantial fleet of landing craft. The Army unit manning these was as much a part of the Task Force as any battalion in the division. No longer was it necessary to *request* amphibious lift, it could be *ordered*, and it was, not only for logistical support but for tactical landings and continuous patrolling. The increased mobility, freedom of action, [and] general expedition that this lent to the operations eastward to the San Remo Plantation demonstrated what should have been obvious, that a landing force commander should have as complete control over his boats as he does over his trucks and tanks.[25]

If the 1st Marine Division had continued to serve in the Southwest Pacific, it is probable that boat detachments would have been assigned to its command in future operations. In the Central Pacific, where successive objectives were usually widely separated small islands, operational requirements for amphibious craft were met differently. There, after the assault landing, Navy small boat pools left at the target, together with the landing force's organic LVTs and DUKWs, provided the necessary logistical and tactical support. Still, the practical uses of a boat detachment under direct command were not lost on many Marines, and the 1st Division's D–4 at New Britain voiced his conviction that in "any operation of an amphibious nature wherein a rapid seizure will be followed by an operation involving movement from shore to shore the demand for boat companies will continue to exist." [26]

Important as the engineer boats were to the success of BACKHANDER operations, there was an even greater star performer among the amphibious craft, the LVT. It is difficult to imagine what the fighting at Cape Gloucester would have been like without the support of amphibian tractors. The LVTs took so vital a part in combat operations in the swamp behind the beaches that their accomplishments can not be separated from the achievements of the infantry and supporting artillery. Despite their occasional use as fighting vehicles, the tractors were employed primarily in a logistical support role. Most 1st Division officers were so sold on their usefulness in supply and evacuation that they disapproved of a proposal to put a turret on the Buffalo, agreeing with General Rupertus, who said: "If you put a turret or a canopy on a Buffalo you have simply a light tank, lightly armored and quite slow. You lose

[24] *Ballance ltr.*

[25] LtCol Robert Amory, Jr., MassNatGrd, ltr to CMC, dtd 2Apr52.

[26] BGen William S. Fellers ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 10Apr52.

the cargo carrying capacity." [27] Regardless of the recommendations of the 1st Division, however, the amphibian tank was already in being and had proved its worth in combat in the Central Pacific. At Peleliu, where the division next landed in assault, LVT(A)s formed the first waves.

The armored vehicle that the 1st Division Marines preferred was the medium tank.[28] The Shermans proved their value repeatedly and repaid many times over the labor that the engineers, pioneers, and Seabees expended to get them through difficult terrain to the front lines. Tank-infantry techniques used in the drive to the airfield so impressed the Army liaison officers with the Marine division that they recommended that they be studied in the U.S. and used in training all units destined for the Southwest Pacific.[29] Marine light tanks served well at Cape Gloucester and Arawe, as they had previously in the South Pacific, but once infantry commanders saw what the mediums could do in the jungle, the cry mounted for more of the heavier-gunned and -armored machines. Light tankmen at Arawe could take credit for pioneering in telephone communication between supporting riflemen and armor, a procedure that became standard throughout the Pacific fighting.

The only unit of BACKHANDER Force to be specially cited for its work at Cape Gloucester was the 11th Marines, which received a Naval Unit Commendation emphasizing the regiments' determination to get into position and fire in support of the assault troops regardless of obstacles.[30] An ALAMO Force observer pinpointed the reason for the high and deserved praise of the regiment when he noted that 1st Division Marines were "very artillery conscious. They claim to have the best artillery in existence and use it effectively at every turn." [31] The 75mm pack howitzer lost ground as a supporting weapon at Cape Gloucester despite its excellent record. Against an enemy that dug in deeply and well on every possible occasion, the heavier, more powerful 105mm howitzer spoke with deadlier effect. To do its best job, however, the 105 needed better ammunition, shells with delay fuzes that would penetrate the jungle cover and blast apart the Japanese bunkers, instead of bursting in the tree canopy or the underbrush.

In one respect, artillery employment at Cape Gloucester did not come up to expectations. The inefficient radios used by the aircraft of the division's squadron of light planes prevented effective artillery spotting. But, if infrequent use was made of the Piper Cubs to direct howitzer fire, there was very little else that the planes and pilots did not do. The range of employment of the makeshift but efficient

[27] Quoted in Col Horace O. Cushman, USA, memo to CofS, ALAMO For, dtd 5Jan44, Subj: Rept of LiaisonO with 1st MarDiv, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 15.*

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] AG 334 (1Feb44) Rept to TAGO, WD, Washington, D.C., dtd 1Feb44, Subj: Rept of LiaisonOs with the 1st MarDiv in the Op to seize the Gloucester Airdrome area on New Britain, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 20.*

[30] Curiously, the citation for the 11th Marines includes an incident that describes the employment of a 37mm gun at Aogiri Ridge, a weapon that was manned by its regular crew and men of 3/5, not artillerymen. Col Lewis W. Walt ltr to HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 24Apr52. See Appendix I, Unit Commendations.

[31] Col J. F. Bird, USA, memo to DepCofS, ALAMO For, dtd 9Jan44, Subj: Rept on BACKHANDER Op from 1–7Jan44, in *ALAMO G–3 Jnl No. 15.*

outfit was as wide as the aerial supply of the Gilnit patrol and the impromptu close air support at the Volupai landing. In future operations in the Pacific, the 1st Marine Division would have a regularly constituted observation squadron assigned for operational control, but the "do anything" tradition of the division's first air unit survived.

General Rupertus, writing to the Commandant shortly before DEXTERITY was formally secured, observed: "We have learned much, especially [from] our errors at Guadalcanal, and I feel sure that we have profited by them in this operation." [32] Perhaps the most useful lesson learned was an appreciation of the value of battlefield intelligence. Throughout the fighting in western New Britain, enemy documents were turned in that might have been pocketed or thrown away by troops who were not convinced of their worth. The wealth of material that came back from assault units and intelligence teams closely trailing the advance was systematically and rapidly evaluated by translators with the combat teams and put to use immediately at the appropriate level of command. With the exception of the *51st Reconnaissance Regiment*, which appeared unheralded on the scene, the 1st Division's order of battle officers kept accurate track of the *Matsuda Force* and its state of combat efficiency.

The terrain was the major obstacle to the efficient use of the enemy intelligence that was accumulated. Although the Marines knew early in the fighting approximately where the Japanese headquarters were and the general location of the trails that were being used for troop deployment, the information was of limited use. The jungle shrouded everything. Even when the division's Cubs skimmed the treetops, the pilots and observers could spot little through the green carpet below. The Allied Air Forces photographic planes that did such a fine job establishing the shoreline and fringing reefs of the objective area were far less successful when the runs crossed the interior. The jungle gave up few secrets, even to the most skilled photographic interpreters.

The infamous "damp flat" area back of the Yellow Beaches was known to contain standing water in the rainy season, but the probing cameras did not show the swamp that actually existed. This fact, however, may have been a blessing in disguise, since it was probable that the assault landing would have been switched to other beaches if the situation had been known. The Japanese were completely unprepared for a landing in such an unsuitable place, and what might have been a hotly contested fight for a toehold on the shore never materialized. Because it was a veteran unit, with a well-trained shore party, the 1st Marine Division was able to surmount the miserable terrain and get firmly established before the enemy made a serious attempt to dislodge it.

Certainly, any well-trained, well-led, but untried Allied division could have wrested control of western New Britain from the *Matsuda Force;* the preponderance of strength lay too heavily in the Allies' favor for any other conclusion. Just as surely, the 1st Marine Division did the job faster, better, and at less cost by virtue of its combat experience, its familiarity with the jungle and the Japanese, and its battle-tested unit spirit. The tactics the Marines

[32] MajGen William H. Rupertus ltr to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, dtd 4Feb44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC).

used were "book" tactics for jungle warfare; their refinements on basic techniques were those of veterans. Fire discipline at night was excellent, patrolling was careful but aggressive, and weapons were always at hand ready to fire. The enemy's captured guns were expertly manned by Marines and turned against their former owners. Small unit leaders were capable of independent action in brush-choked terrain, where the bitterest fighting was often done at close range with an unseen enemy.

The 1st Marine Division was jungle-wise and combat-ready when it landed on New Britain. When it left, four months later, its mission accomplished, it was an even more effective team. Ahead lay a summer of intensive training and then combat again, this time at Peleliu, a bloody step closer to Japan.

PART V

Marine Air Against Rabaul

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Target: Rabaul

The overriding objective of the Allied campaign in the Southwest Pacific was, at first, to capture, and, later, to neutralize Rabaul. Each successive advance during 1943 had its worth valued by the miles it chopped off the distance to this enemy stronghold. To a large extent, the key to the objectives and pace of CARTWHEEL operations was this distance, measured in terms of the range of the fighter plane. No step forward was made beyond the effective reach of land-based fighter cover.

The firm establishment of each new Allied position placed a lethal barrier of interceptors closer to Rabaul and its outguard of satellite bases. Equally as important, the forward airfields provided a home for the fighter escorts and dive bombers which joined with long-range bombers to knock out the enemy's airfields. Protected by mounting numbers of Allied planes, many of them manned by Marines, the areas of friendly territory that saw their last hostile aircraft or vessel grew steadily. Japanese admirals learned from bitter experience that their ships could not sail where their planes could not fly.

By carrying the fight to the enemy, Allied air units played a decisive role in reducing Rabaul to impotency. Although this aerial offensive was closely related to the air actions in direct support of CARTWHEEL's amphibious operations, its importance warrants separate accounting.

OBJECTIVE FOLDER[1]

As they fought their way up the Solomons chain and along the enemy coast of eastern New Guinea, few members of Halsey's and MacArthur's naval and ground forces had time to consider any Japanese position but the one to their immediate front. To these men, Rabaul was little more than a worrisome name, the base of the enemy ships and planes that attacked them. Allied pilots and aircrews, however, got to know the Japanese fortress and its defenders intimately. The sky over St. George's Channel, Blanche Bay, and Gazelle Peninsula was the scene of one of the most bitterly fought campaigns of the Pacific War.

To picture Rabaul as it appeared to the men who battled to reach it, to bomb and strafe it, and to get away alive, requires a description of more than the northern tip of Gazelle Peninsula where the town, its harbor, and its airfields were located. To flyers, the approaches were as familiar as

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: AlGeographicalSect, SWPA, Terrain Study No. 22, Area Study of Gazelle Peninsula and Rabaul, dtd 6Oct42 and Terrain Study No. 74, Area Study of Gazelle Peninsula, dtd 3Jan44; MID, WD, Survey of Bismarck Archipelago (S30–675), dtd 5Oct43. Documents not otherwise identified in this part are located in the following files of the Archives, Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps: Unit Historical Reports; Publications; Aviation; Monograph and Comment.

the objective itself, and a strike directed against Rabaul evoked a parade of impressions—long over-water flights; jungle hills slipping by below; the sight of the target—airfield, ship, or town, sometimes all three; the attack and the violent defense; and then the seemingly longer, weary return over land and sea.

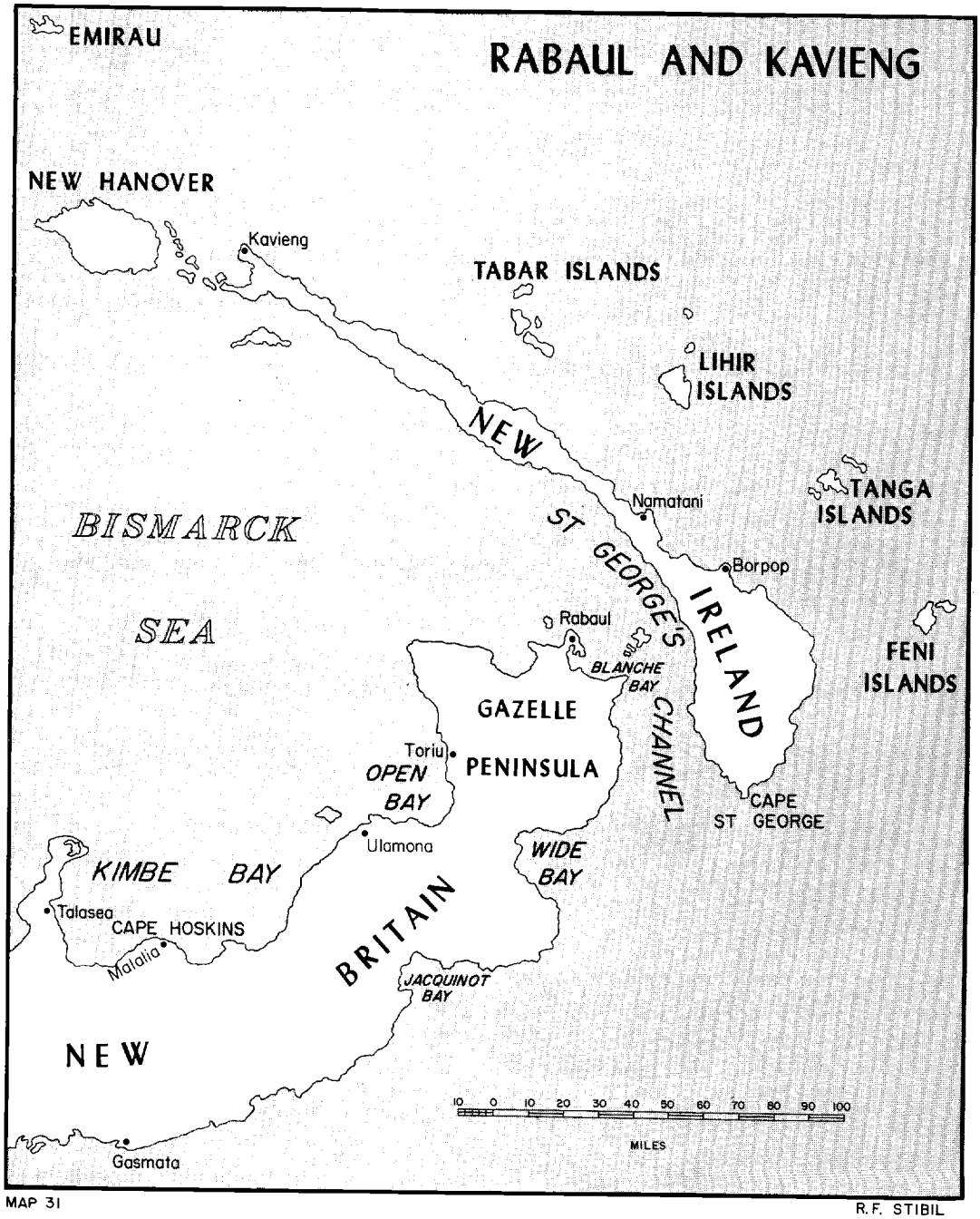
In order to fix Rabaul as an air objective, one should visualize its position in midyear 1943 as the powerful hub of the Japanese airbase system in the Southeast Area. To the west on New Guinea, at Hollandia, Wewak, and Madang, were major airdromes with advance airstrips building on the Huon Peninsula and across Vitiaz Strait at Cape Gloucester. Staging fields in the Admiralty Islands gave enemy pilots a place to set down on the flight from eastern New Guinea to Rabaul. Kavieng's airbase was also a frequent stopover point, not only for planes coming from the west but for those flying south from Truk, home of the *Combined Fleet* and its carriers. Southeast of New Britain in the Solomons lay the important airfields at Buka Passage at one end of Bougainville and at Buin-Kahili and Ballale Island at the other. Forward strips at Vila and Munda in the New Georgia Group marked the limit of Japanese expansion.

Distances in statute miles from Rabaul to the principal bases which guarded it, and to the more important Allied positions from which it was attacked, are as follows:

Truk	795
Guadalcanal	650
Wewak	590
Port Moresby	485
Madang	450
Munda Point	440
Dobodura	390
Lae	385
Admiralties	375
Woodlark	345
Finschhafen	340
Kahili	310
Kiriwina	310
Cape Gloucester	270
Cape Torokina	255
Buka Passage	190
Kavieng	145

The starting point for measuring these distances was a small colonial town that had, in the immediate prewar years, a population of about 850 Europeans, 2,000 Chinese, and 4,000 Melanesians. Quite the most important place in the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea, Rabaul was for many years the capital of the mandate. When two volcanic craters near the town erupted in May 1937, the decision was made to shift the government to Lae, but the pace of island life was such that the move had barely begun when the Japanese struck.

The town was located on the shore of Simpson Harbor, the innermost part of Blanche Bay, a hill-encircled expanse six miles long and two and a half wide. One of the finest natural harbors in the Southwest Pacific, the bay is actually the crater of an enormous volcano, with the only breach in its rim the entryway from the sea and St. George's Channel. Two sheer rocks called The Beehives, which rise 174 feet above the water near the entrance to Simpson Harbor, are the only obstacles to navigation within the bay. There is space for at least 20 10,000–15,000-ton vessels, plus a host of smaller craft, to anchor within Simpson's bounds. Separated from this principal anchorage by little Matupi Island is Matupi Harbor, a sheltered stretch guarded on the east and north by a wall of mountains. Just inside the



MAP 31 R.F. STIBIL

headlands, Praed Point and Raluana Point, at the entrance to Blanche Bay are two further protected harbors. Both, Escape Bay in the north by Praed Point and Karavia Bay in the south, are less useful, as their waters are too deep for effective anchorages.

Prominent landmarks, as easily recognizable from the air as The Beehives, are the craters that form a part of the hills surrounding Rabaul. Directly east of Matupi Harbor is Mt. Tavurvur (741 feet), which erupted in 1937, and due north is Rabalankaia Crater (640 feet). These two heights give Crater Peninsula its name, but they are overshadowed by the peninsula's mountainous ridge which has three companion peaks, South Daughter (1,620 feet), The Mother (2,247 feet), and North Daughter (1,768 feet). The town of Rabaul nestled between the foothills of North Daughter and the narrow sandy beaches of Simpson Harbor. Across Blanche Bay from Mt. Tavurvur is its partner in the 1937 eruption, Vulcan Crater (740 feet), which juts out from the western shore to form one arm of Karavia Bay.

In the years of peace, the land to the south and east of Blanche Bay was extensively planted in coconuts. The rich volcanic soil there was fertile, and, like most of the northern third of Gazelle Peninsula, the area was relatively flat. Most of the 100 or so plantations on the peninsula were located here, with a large part of them to be found in the region north of the Warangoi and Keravit Rivers. The only other considerable plantation area along the northern coast lay between Cape Lambert, the westernmost point on Gazelle Peninsula, and Ataliklikun Bay, into which the Keravit River emptied. The majority of the 36,000 natives who were estimated to be on the peninsula lived in or near this northern sector.

The rest of Gazelle Peninsula, which is shaped roughly like a square with 50-mile-long sides, is mountainous, smothered by jungle, and inhospitable to the extreme. Two deep bights, Wide Bay on the east coast and Open Bay on the west, set off the peninsula from the rest of New Britain. Access to Rabaul from this part of the island was possible by a coastal track, broken frequently by swamps and rivers, and a web of trails that cut through the rugged interior. For the most part, these routes were hard going and usable only by men on foot.

The wild, inaccessible nature of the central and southern sectors of Gazelle Peninsula made the contrast with the Rabaul area all the more striking. Even before the war, the mandate government had developed a good road net to serve the various villages, plantations, and missions. The Japanese made extensive improvements and expanded the road system to connect with their troop bivouacs and supply dumps. Many of these installations were invisible from the air, hidden in the patches of jungle that interspersed the plantations and farms. The major Japanese construction work, however, was done on airfields, and the five that they expanded or built from scratch became as familiar to Allied aircrews as their own home bases.

Both of the small fields maintained at Rabaul by the Royal Australian Air Force were enlarged and made into major airdromes by the Japanese. Lakunai airfield and its hardstands and revetments occupied all the available ground on a small peninsula that ran out to Matupi Island. A 4,700-foot coral runway, varying in

width from 425 to 525 feet, began at Simpson Harbor and ended at Matupi Harbor. The sharply rising slopes of Rabalankaia Crater blocked any extension of the field to the northeast and a small creek was a barrier on the northwest.

The other former RAAF base, Vunakanau airfield, was located at an altitude of 1,000 feet on a plateau about 11 miles southwest of Rabaul. Except for two coconut plantations, the plateau was covered by scrub growth and kunai grass. The ground was quite irregular and laced with deep gullies, and the 5,100 x 750-foot runway the enemy built was the practical limit of expansion. Centered on this grass-covered larger strip was a concrete runway, 4,050 feet long and 140 feet wide. Vunakanau became the largest Japanese airdrome at Rabaul, and its straggling network of dispersal lanes and revetments spread over an area of almost two square miles.

The longest airstrip at Rabaul was constructed at Rapopo on the shore of St. George's Channel about 14 miles southeast of the town and a little over 5 miles west of Cape Gazelle, the northeast corner of Gazelle Peninsula. Designed and built as a bomber field, Rapopo was sliced through the center of a coconut plantation that gave it its name. The clearing for the north-south strip ran 6,900 feet from the sea to a river that effectively barred further extension. A coral-surfaced runway began about 1,600 feet from a low, coastal bluff and occupied the full width of the cleared space.

Well inland from the other airfields, 15 miles southeast of Vunakanau and 8 miles southwest of Rapopo, the Japanese built Tobera airfield. Its runway, 5,300 x 700 feet, with a hard-surfaced central strip 4,800 x 400 feet, was situated on a gently sloping plateau that divided the streams which flowed north to the sea from those which ran south to the Warangoi River. Like most of its companion fields, Tobera was constructed in a plantation area with its dispersal lanes and field installations scattered amidst the coconut trees.

The fifth airfield at Rabaul was located on Ataliklikun Bay just north of the Keravat River and 26 miles southwest of Rabaul. Keravat airfield was plagued by drainage problems and had perhaps the poorest location and the greatest engineering problems. By the end of November 1943, the Japanese had been able to grade and surface a 4,800 x 400-foot runway, but Keravat never became fully operational and saw very limited use as an emergency landing ground.

Caught up and deserted by the rush of events was an auxiliary airfield that was started and never finished on Duke of York Island. The island is the largest of a group of 13 islets that stand in St. George's Channel midway between New Britain and New Ireland. The press for additional airstrips on which to locate and, later, to disperse and protect Rabaul's air garrison was met instead by fields on New Ireland.

There were four operational airfields on that narrow, 220-mile-long island with two, Namatami and Borpop, sited about 50 miles northeast of Rabaul on New Ireland's eastern shore. At Kavieng on the island's northern tip and Panapai close by was an extensive airbase, the largest in the Bismarcks outside of Rabaul's immediate environs. Kavieng and Rabaul had been seized at the same time and grew apace with each other until they both, in turn, were relegated to the backwash of the war by the withdrawal of their aerial defenders.

GARRISON FORCES[2]

In January 1942, Rabaul had a small garrison of about 1,350 men, a reinforced Australian infantry battalion. Kavieng had no defenders at all save a few police boys. The towns themselves and the islands on which they stood were ripe for the taking whenever the Japanese got around to the task. In the enemy's war plans, elements of the *Fourth Fleet* that had seized Guam and Wake made up the *Rabaul Invasion Force.* The assault troops at Rabaul would be the *South Seas Detached Force*, an Army brigade that had landed at Guam, reinforced by two companies of the *Maizuru 2d Special Naval Landing Force*, the victors at Wake.[3] The remainder of the *Maizuru 2d* was detailed to occupy Kavieng.

The *Rabaul Invasion Force* rendezvoused at sea north of the Bismarcks on 19 January, and, on the next day, enemy carrier-based bombers and fighters hit both targets. At Rabaul, the defending air force—five RAAF Wirraway observation planes—was quickly shot out of the sky, and the airstrips were bombed. The carrier planes made diversionary raids on Lae, Salamaua, and Madang on the 21st, and then hit Rabaul again on the 22d, knocking out Australian gun positions on North Daughter and at Praed Point.

After this brief preparation, Japanese transports and supporting vessels sailed into Blanche Bay near midnight on 22 January, and the assault troops began a staggered series of landings shortly thereafter. The enemy soldiers stormed ashore at several points along the western beaches of Simpson Harbor and Karavia Bay, while the naval landing force hit Rabaul and Lakunai airfield. The Australians, spread out in small strongpoints along the shore and on the ridge just inland, fought desperately in the darkness but were gradually overwhelmed and forced to pull back. As daylight broke, the 5,000-man Japanese landing force called down naval gunfire and air support to hammer the retreating defenders. At about 1100, the Australian commander, seeing that further resistance would be fruitless, ordered his men to break contact, split up into small parties, and try to escape.

The Japanese harried the Australian troops relentlessly, using planes and destroyers to support infantry pursuit col-

[2] Unless otherwise noted the material in this section is derived from: ATIS, MIS, GHQ, SCAP, Docu No. 17895 (WDI–46), dtd 9May46, Subj: Full Translation of a Rept on the Japanese Invasion of Rabaul, n.d. (COA, NHD); ATIS, MIS, GHQ, FEC, Japanese Monograph No. 140, Outline of SE Area NavAirOps—Pt IV, dtd Jul49, hereafter *SE Area NavAirOps—IV;* Japanese ResearchDiv, MilHistSec, HQUSAF FE, Japanese Monograph No. 142, Outline of SE Area NavAirOps—Pt V (Dec 43–May 44), n.d., hereafter *SE Area NavAirOps—V; Eighth Area ArmyOps; SE Area NavOps—III;* Statement of LtCol H. H. Carr, CO, 2/22 Bn, AIF, App A to AlGeographicalSect, Terrain Study No. 22, *op. cit.*; USSBS, *Interrogation* No. 446, Cdr Takashi Miyazaki, IJN, II, pp. 413–421, hereafter *Miyazaki Interrogation;* USSBS, *Interrogation* No. 479, Capt Minoru Genda, IJN, dtd 28–29Nov45 (USSBS Recs, National Archives); Masatake Okumiya and Jiro Horikoshi with Martin Caidin, *Zero!* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1956), hereafter Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*; USSBS(Pac), NavAnalysisDiv, Marshalls-Gilberts-New Britain Party, *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul* (Washington: GPO, 1946), hereafter USSBS, *Campaign Against Rabaul.*

[3] For details of the earlier actions of these Japanese units see Volume I of this series, pp. 75–78, 129–149.

umns. Most of the defenders were eventually trapped and killed or captured on Gazelle Peninsula, but one group of about 250 officers and men stayed a jump ahead of the Japanese, reached Talasea after an exhausting march, and got away safely by boat, landing at Cairns, Queensland, on 28 March. Naturally enough, the fact that they were driven from Rabaul rankled the Australians, but the opportunity for retaliation was still years away.

Flushed with success, the Japanese set about extending their hold throughout the Bismarcks, the Solomons, and eastern New Guinea. Rabaul served as a funnel through which troops, supplies, and equipment poured, at first in a trickle, then in a growing stream until the defeats at Guadalcanal and Buna-Gona checked the two-pronged advance. In the resulting reassessment of their means and objectives, the Japanese reluctantly decided to shift to a holding action in the Solomons in order to concentrate on mounting a sustained offensive on New Guinea. Essential to this enemy decision was the fact that a system of airfields existed between Rabaul and Guadalcanal.

The 650-mile distance from Henderson Field to Vunakanau and Lakunai was a severe handicap to Japanese air operations during the Guadalcanal campaign. The need for intermediate bases was obvious, and enemy engineers carved a succession of airfields from plantations, jungle, and grasslands in the central and northern Solomons during the last few months of 1942. Only Buka, which was operational in October, was completed in time to be of much use in supporting air attacks on the Allied positions on Guadalcanal. Fields at Kahili, Ballale, Vila, and Munda, however, were all in use by the end of February 1943, some as staging and refueling stops and the others as fully operational bases. It was these airfields that furnished Rabaul the shield that the Japanese needed to stave off, blunt, or delay Allied attacks from the South Pacific Area. The task of manning these bases was exclusively the province of the *Eleventh Air Fleet.*

The *Eighth Area Army's* counterpart of Admiral Kusaka's air fleet, the *6th Air Division*, was almost wholly committed to support of operations on New Guinea by the end of 1942. During the bitter fighting in Papua, Japanese air support had been sporadic and sparse, a situation that General Imamura intended to correct. Rapopo Airfield at Rabaul, which became operational in April 1943, was constructed by the Army to accommodate a growing number of planes, and work was begun on a Navy field at Keravat to handle even more. At about this time, the strength of the *6th Air Division* peaked at 300 aircraft of all types. Many of these planes were stationed at Rabaul, but a good part were flying from fields on New Guinea, for Imamura had ordered the *6th* to begin moving to the giant island on 12 April.

On eastern New Guinea, as in the Solomons, airfields closer to the battle scene than those at Rabaul were needed to provide effective air support to Japanese troops. Consequently, two major airbases were developed at Wewak and Madang on the coast northwest of the Huon Peninsula. Despite the heavy use of these fields, the operating efficiency of Army air units dropped steadily in the first part of 1943. The rate at which *6th Air Division* planes were destroyed by Allied pilots and gunners was so great that even an average

monthly flow of 50 replacement aircraft could not keep pace with the losses. In July, Tokyo added the *7th Air Division* from the Netherlands East Indies to *Eighth Area Army's* order of battle and followed through by assigning the *Fourth Air Army* to command and coordinate air operations. By the time the air army's headquarters arrived at Rabaul on 6 August, a move of all Army combat aircraft from the Bismarcks was well underway.

In light of the desperate need of the *Eighteenth Army* on New Guinea for air support, *Imperial General Headquarters* had urged General Imamura to leave the air defense of Rabaul entirely to the Navy and concentrate all his air strength in the *Eighteenth's* sector. After discussing the proposed change with Admiral Kusaka, who would acquire sole responsibility for directing air operations at Rabaul, the general ordered the transfer. By the end of August, *Fourth Air Army's* headquarters was established at Wewak, and all Army aircraft, except a handful of reconnaissance and liaison types, were located on New Guinea.

When the last Japanese Army plane lifted from Rapopo's runway, the crucial period of the Allied aerial campaign against Rabaul was still in the offing. The men, the planes, and the units that would fight the enemy's battle were essentially those which had contested the advance of South Pacific forces up the Solomons chain in a year of furious and costly air actions. In that time, Japanese naval air groups were rotated in and out of Rabaul, and were organized and disbanded there with little apparent regard for a fixed table of organization. Two administrative headquarters, the *25th* and *26th Air Flotillas*, operated under *Eleventh Air Fleet* to control the air groups; for tactical purposes, the flight echelons of the flotillas were organized as the *5th* and *6th Air Attack Forces*. Since the accounts of senior surviving air fleet officers, including Admiral Kusaka, differ considerably in detail on enemy strength and organization, only reasonable approximations can be given for any one period.

In September 1943, on the eve of the Allied air offensive against Rabaul, the *Eleventh Air Fleet* mustered about 300 planes and 10,000 men, including perhaps 1,500 flying personnel. Three fighter groups, the *201st Air Group*, the *204th*, and the *253d*, each with a nominal strength of 50 aircraft and 75 pilots, were the core of the interceptor force. One medium bomber unit, the *705th Air Group*, was present, together with elements of at least two more groups, but heavy losses had reduced them all to skeleton proportions of a bomber group's normal strength of 48 planes and 300 crewmen. There was one combined dive bomber-torpedo bomber outfit, the *582d Air Group*, whose strength was 36 attack aircraft and 150 crewmen. Two reconnaissance groups, the *938th* and *958th*, each with 28 float planes and about 100 flying personnel, completed the air fleet's complement of major units. A few flying boats, some transports assigned to each air group, and headquarters and liaison aircraft were also present.

To keep up with the steady drain of combat and operational losses, Tokyo sent 50 replacement aircraft to Rabaul each month. Approximately one-third of these planes were lost in transit, but the remainder, 80 percent of them fighters, reached their destination after a long overwater flight staged through Truk and Kavieng. Land-based naval air units in quiet sectors of the Pacific were drawn

upon heavily for planes and pilots and received in exchange battle-fatigued veterans from Rabaul.[4] The drain of Japanese naval planes and personnel from the Netherlands Indies grew so serious toward the end of 1943 that the Army's *7th Air Division* had to be returned to the area to plug the gap.

In every possible way, the Japanese tried to ready Rabaul's air garrison for the certain Allied onslaught. Flight operations from the most exposed forward airstrips in the Solomons were sharply curtailed to conserve aircraft and crews. At all airfields, blast pens and dispersal areas were strengthened and expanded, and antiaircraft guns were disposed in depth to cover approaches. Tobera airfield was rushed to completion to lessen the concentration of aircraft at Vunakanau and Lakunai and to provide space for reinforcements from the *Combined Fleet*. Poised at Truk, two carrier air groups with about 300 planes stood ready to join Kusaka's command when the situation worsened enough to demand their commitment. Although the newest Japanese plane models were to be fed in to Rabaul's air defense as they became available, the overwhelming majority of the planes that would rise to meet the Allied attacks would be from one family of fighters, the Zeros.

ENEMY PLANES AND AIRCREWS[5]

During the first nine months of the war, the Allies tried to identify Japanese aircraft as the enemy did, by the year of initial adoption and type. The calendar the Japanese used was peculiarly their own, with the year 2597 corresponding to 1937, and there were a number of different Type 97s in use, among them an Army fighter, an Army medium bomber, a Navy torpedo bomber, and a Navy flying boat. This was the system that gave rise to the name Zero for the Type O Navy fighter plane that was first employed in 1940 during the fighting in China.

By the time of Pearl Harbor, the Zero had replaced its Type 96 predecessor as the standard Japanese carrier fighter. Based on its performance capabilities, enemy intelligence officers were confident that the plane could gain control of the air over any battle area, and that in aerial combat, "one Zero would be the equal of from two to five enemy [Allied] fighter planes, depending upon the type."[6] This assessment, unfortunately, proved to be too close to the truth for the peace of mind of Allied pilots. In a dogfight, the Zero was at its best; at speeds below 300 miles per hour, it could outmaneuver any plane

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[4] USSBS, *Interrogation* No. 360, Capt Hironaka Komoto, IJN, II, p. 288.

[5] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: IntelServ, USAAF, InfoIntelSummary No. 85, Flight Characteristics of the Japanese Zero Fighter Zeke, dtd Mar43, and No. 40–11, Japanese Aircraft and Armament, dtd Mar44, hereafter as part of a series *USAAF InfoIntelSummary* with appropriate number, subject, and date; AirInfoDiv, CNO, Organization and Rank in the Japanese Army and Navy Air Services (Op–35 AID #A2), dtd Aug43; Technical AirIntelCen, NAS, Anacostia, Japanese Aircraft Performance and Characteristics, TAIC Manual No. 1 (OpNav–16–VT#301), dtd Dec44; *Miyazaki Interrogation;* USSBS (Pac), MilAnalysisDiv, *Japanese Air Power* (Washington; GPO, Jul46); WD, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces, TM 30–480* (Washington, 1Oct44); Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*

[6] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 60. All material quoted by permission of the publishers, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., acting for the copyright holder, Martin Caidin.

that it encountered in 1942. By the end of that year, however, the Zero had officially lost its well-remembered name among the Allies and had become instead, the Zeke.

The name change, part of a new system of enemy aircraft designation, was ordered into effect in the Southwest Pacific in September 1942 and adopted in the South Pacific in December. The Japanese identification method, with all kinds of planes assigned the same type-year, proved too cumbersome for Allied use. In its stead, enemy aircraft were given short, easily pronounced code titles; fighters and floatplanes received masculine names, with feminine names going to bombers, flying boats, and land-based reconnaissance planes. Despite the switch, the name Zero died hard, particularly among Marine pilots and aircrews in Halsey's forces, and it was at least six months before they gave the substitute, Zeke, popular as well as official sanction.[7]

The Zeke was unquestionably the most important enemy plane that fought in the Rabaul aerial campaign. Developed by the Mitsubishi Aircraft Company, the original version of the fighter had two models, one with folding wing tips for carrier use and the other built to operate from land bases. An all-metal, single-engine monoplane, the Zeke had low-set wings tapered to a rounded tip. The pilot sat high in an enclosed cockpit controlling two 7.7mm machine guns synchronized to fire through the propeller and two 20mm cannon fixed in the wings. Performance assets were rapid take-off and high climbing rates, exceptional maneuverability at speeds up to 300 miles per hour, and a total range of 1,580 miles with maximum fuel load and economy speeds. The Zeke's principal liabilities as a combat aircraft, ones it shared with every Japanese military plane, were relatively flimsy construction and a lack of armor protection for pilot, fuel, and oxygen.

Most of the Zekes that defended Rabaul in late 1943 were of a later model than the 1940. The improved planes had the same general appearance but were fitted with racks to carry one 132-pound bomb under each wing and had a more powerful motor that added 15 miles to the former maximum speed of 328 miles per hour at 16,000 feet. Another model of the basic Type O Navy fighter, one with the same engine, armament, and flight performance as the later model Zeke, was the Hamp.[8] Identified at first as a new plane type because of its shorter, blunt-tipped wing, the Hamp was later recognized as a legitimate offspring of the parent Zero. The only other Navy fighter operating out of Rabaul in significant numbers was the Rufe, a slower floatplane version of the Zeke.

The standard enemy land-based naval bomber was the versatile Betty, a 1941 model that was as frequently used on transport, reconnaissance, and torpedo bombing missions as it was for its primary purpose. In the pattern of most enemy medium bombers, the Betty was a twin-engine, mid-wing monoplane with a cigar-shaped fuselage and a transparent nose, cockpit, and tail. Operated by a crew of

[7] Sherrod, *MarAirHist*, p. 135*n*.

[8] This fighter was at first called the Hap, an unsolicited compliment to General Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, Commanding General, Army Air Forces. Soon after word of it reached Washington, there was an abrupt change in nomenclature. Vern Haugland, *The AAF Against Japan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 371.

seven to nine men, the plane could carry a maximum bomb load of 2,200 pounds and was armed with four 7.7mm machine guns, all in single mounts, and a 20mm cannon in its tail turret. The Betty was fast, 276 miles per hour at 15,000 feet, and had a range of 2,110 miles at cruising speed with a normal fuel and bomb load. To achieve this relatively high speed and long range, Mitsubishi Aircraft's designers had sacrificed armor and armament. Much of the plane was built of lightweight magnesium, a very inflammable metal, and in the wing roots and body between were poorly protected fuel and oil tanks. "The result was a highly vulnerable aircraft so prone to burst into flames when hit that Japanese aircrews nicknamed it 'Type 1 Lighter.'" [9]

Even more vulnerable to Allied fire than the Betty was the principal dive bomber in the *Eleventh Air Fleet*, the Val. The pilot, who controlled two forward firing 7.7mms in the nose of the monoplane, sat over one unprotected fuel tank and between two others in the wings; the gunner, who manned a flexible-mount 7.7mm in the rear of the cockpit enclosure, was uncomfortably close to the highly explosive oxygen supply. A pair of bomb racks located under each of the plane's distinctive elliptical-shaped wings, and one under the body between the fixed landing gear, enabled the Val to carry one 550- and four 132-pound bombs. The dive bomber's best speed was 254 miles per hour at 13,000 feet, and its normal range at cruising speed with a full bomb load was 1,095 miles. When it flew without escort, the Val was easy game for most Allied fighters.

[9] "Biography of Betty," in *USAAF InfoIntel-Summary* No. 44–21, dtd 10Jul44, p. 3.

The slowest of the major plane types at Rabaul, and the one with the poorest performance, was a torpedo bomber, the Kate. The plane was as poorly armed as the Val and was almost as inflammable. The two- to three-man crew all sat in a long, enclosed cockpit atop a slim 33-foot body; the wing span of the monoplane, 50 feet, gave it a foreshortened look. One torpedo at 1,760 pounds was its usual load, although a 1,000-pound bomb or two 250-pound bombs could be carried instead. Since it had a weak engine and its lethal cargo was stowed externally, at emergency speed and its best operating altitude, 8,500 feet, the Kate could only make 222 miles per hour.

Aside from those mentioned, many other Japanese Navy aircraft and an occasional Army plane were encountered and engaged by the Allies in aerial attacks on Rabaul. The Zeke fighter family, however, furnished most of the interceptors and escorts, and the Bettys, Vals, and Kates delivered the dwindling enemy offensive thrusts. A once-numerous fleet of Japanese flying boats, reconnaissance planes, and transports fell away into insignificance by October 1943. The feebly armed and unarmed survivors avoided Allied aircraft like a plague, since they were dead birds if caught.

There was no enemy plane that flew from Rabaul that was not a potential flaming death trap to its crew. To meet the specifications outlined by the Japanese Navy, aircraft designers sacrificed safety to achieve maneuverability in fighters and long range in bombers. Heightening the losses suffered by these highly vulnerable planes was the plummeting level of skill of their flying and maintenance personnel.

CAPTURED JAPANESE ZERO, *showing U.S. plane markings, aloft over the San Diego area during test flights.* (*USN 80–G–11475*)

JAPANESE VAL DIVE BOMBERS *are shown armed and ready to take off on a bombing mission in film captured early in 1943.* (*USN 80–G–345598*)

By 1943, the problem of keeping aircraft in forward areas in good operational condition and adequately manned had become acute. The senior staff officer of the *25th Air Flotilla* during the critical period of the battle for Rabaul recalled:

> In the beginning of the war, during 1942, if 100% of the planes were available for an attack one day, the next day 80% would be available, on the third day 50%. In 1943, at any one time, only 50% of the planes were ever available, and on the next day following an all-out operation only 30% would be available. By the end of 1943, only 40% at any one time would be serviceable. In 1942, the low availability was due to lack of supply; from 1943 on, it was due to lack of skill on the part of maintenance personnel and faulty manufacturing methods. Inspection of the aircraft and spare parts, prior to their delivery to Rabaul, was inadequate, and there were many poorly constructed and weak parts discovered. The Japanese tried to increase production so fast that proper examination was impossible.[10]

Japanese naval aviation had begun the war with 2,120 aircraft of all types, including trainers. In April 1943, after 16 months of heavy fighting, the total strength stood at 2,980, which meant that the manufacturers had been able to do little more than keep pace with combat and operational losses. In the succeeding year, the production rate nearly doubled, but losses soared also; there were 6,598 planes on hand in April 1944, but the standard of construction had deteriorated badly.[11]

Even more serious than the sag in the quality of naval aircraft maintenance and production was the steady attrition of experienced flight personnel. The pilots who began the war averaged 800 hours of flying time, and many of them had combat experience in China. Relatively few of these men survived until the end of 1943; a great many died at Coral Sea and Midway and in air battles over Guadalcanal. Others crashed trying to stretch the limited range of Vals and Kates to cover the long stretch between Rabaul and Guadalcanal. The replacements, pilots and aircrews alike, could not hope to match the worth of the men whose places they took.

Two years of flight training and practice had been the prewar requisite to make a man a qualified naval pilot or "observer" (bombardiers, navigators, and gunners). In 1941, the training time was cut about in half. Pilots spent about 60 hours in primary and intermediate trainers, observers spent 44, both in a six-month period. Flight training in combat types, spread over a four-to-six month period, was 100 hours for pilots and 60 hours for observers. Thereafter, 150 hours of tactical flight training was programmed for men in the units to which they were assigned. At Rabaul, however, this phase was spent in combat, and those few who survived 150 hours could count themselves as living on borrowed time.

The majority of flying personnel in the Japanese Navy were warrant officers, petty officers, and naval ratings. Regular and reserve officers selected for pilot and observer training were intended for command billets; they were few in number, and, as combat flight leaders, their losses were disproportionately great. In the Rabaul area by the fall of 1943, a representative Betty unit with 11 planes had only one officer among 23 pilots and one among 38 observers, while all of the 39

[10] *Miyazaki Interrogation*, p. 418.

[11] USSBS, *Interrogation* No. 414, Cdr J. Fukamizu, IJN, II, p. 374, Anx B.

radiomen and mechanics were enlisted men.[12]

An experienced Japanese combat air commander, operations officer at Buin-Kahili during September 1943, characterized these aircrews as personifying:

> . . . Japan's people on the battlefield, for they came from every walk of life. Some of them carried the names of well-known families; some non-commissioned officers were simple laborers. Some were the only sons of their parents. While we maintained strict military discipline on the ground, with proper observance for rank, class, and age, those differences no longer existed when a crew's plane lifted its wheels from the ground.
>
> The enemy cared little about the groups which constituted our aircrews and there existed no discrimination on the part of the pilot who caught our planes in his sights! Our air crews were closely knit, for it mattered not one whit whether an enlisted man or an officer manned the machine guns or cannon. The effect was exactly the same. Unfortunately this feeling of solidarity of our aircrews was unique in the Japanese military organization.[13]

Fighter pilot or bomber crewman, the Japanese naval flyer who fought at Rabaul was aware that he was waging a losing battle. The plane he flew was a torch, waiting only an incendiary bullet to set it alight. The gaping holes in his unit left by the death of veterans were filled by young, inexperienced replacements, more a liability than an asset in combat air operations. Despite the handicaps under which he fought—out-numbered, out-gunned, and out-flown—the enemy flyers fought tenaciously right up to the day when Rabaul was abandoned to its ground defenders.

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[12] ComSoPac, Weekly AirCIntelRepts, 7Feb43–27May44, Rept of 3–9Oct43, hereafter *SoPac ACI Repts.*

[13] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 294.

Approach March

COMAIRSOLS [1]

Even a cursory study of the organizational structure of air command in the South Pacific can produce a headache for the orderly mind. Many officers held two or three billets concurrently, in units of their own service as well as elements of SoPac task forces. The resulting maze of administrative and command channels might appear unworkable, but it functioned smoothly as a result of Admiral Halsey's emphasis on the principle of unity of command. He "insisted that each commander of a task force must have full authority over all components of his force, regardless of service or nationality." [2] Under this tenet, Commander, Aircraft, Solomons (ComAirSols), directed the combat operations of all land-based air in the Solomons during CARTWHEEL.

Rear Admiral Charles P. Mason was the first officer to hold the title ComAirSols; he assumed command on 15 February 1943 at Guadalcanal. Actually, Mason took over a going concern, as he relieved Brigadier General Francis P. Mulcahy, who had controlled all aircraft stationed at the island during the final phase of its defense. Mulcahy, who became Mason's chief of staff, was also Commanding General, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. The fact that a general headed the staff of an admiral is perhaps the best indication of the multiservice nature of AirSols operations. Since Mason brought only a few officers

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComSoPac Apr–Oct43 WarDs;* HistDiv, AC/AS Intel, Data pertaining to the ThirteenthAF in the Campaigns of the Lower, Central, and Northern Solomons, 29Mar42–27Sep44 (File 750–01, AF Archives, Maxwell AFB), hereafter *ThirteenthAF Data;* StrikeComd, AirSols, WarDs, 4Apr43–1Jun44, hereafter *StrikeComd WarDs;* Col William O. Brice interview by HistDiv, HQMC, dtd 30Jan45, filed in folder, ComAirSols Repts—Orders—Plans, 1943–44; AvnHistUnit, OP–519B, DCNO(Air), *The Navy's Air War, A Mission Completed,* Lt A. R. Buchanan, USNR, ed. (New York and London: Harper and Brothers [1946]), hereafter Buchanan, *Navy's Air War;* Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* SqnLdr J. M. S. Ross, RNZAF, *Royal New Zealand Air Force—Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–45* (Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1955), hereafter Ross, *RNZAF;* Sherrod, *MarAirHist.*

[2] ComThirdFlt ltr to CominCh, dtd 3Sep44, Subj: Narrative Account—SoPac Campaign (COA, NHD), p. 4. A former chief of staff of AirSols recalls that the command chain was so confused in the beginning that "a Navy squadron commander, land based on Guadalcanal, could not prescribe the hours that the air crews taking care of the planes would work. These hours were prescribed by the CASU [Carrier Aircraft Service Unit] commander whose chain of command ran through a dubious chain of island commanders back to Admiral Halsey. When this was brought to the amazed attention of Admiral Halsey, he immediately issued orders that any air personnel under the operational control of ComAirSols would be under his direct command." LtGen Field Harris ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 22Oct62.

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with him to help run the new command with its enlarged scope of activity, he kept Mulcahy's veteran staff. Experience, not rank, seniority, or service, determined the assignments.

Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, as Commander, Aircraft, South Pacific (ComAirSoPac), was Admiral Mason's immediate superior. The senior officer retained two areas of flight operations under his direct control; sea search by long range Navy patrol planes and Army bombers, and transport operations by South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command (SCAT). Throughout its long and useful life (November 1942–February 1945), SCAT's complement of Marine and Army transports was headed by MAG–25's commanding officer. SCAT's operations area moved northward with the fighting during 1943, and by August's end, all regularly scheduled flights in SoPac's rear areas were being handled by the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS).[3]

Admiral Fitch, in addition to his immediate concern with the far-ranging sea search and transport operations, coordinated the multitude of air combat and support activities within the whole of Halsey's extensive command area. In administrative and logistical matters, there was a headquarters at Pearl Harbor above ComAirSoPac. Air Force, Pacific Fleet (AirPac) controlled allocation and distribution of Navy and Marine planes, materiel, and aviation personnel throughout the Pacific and was responsible for advance training and combat readiness of squadrons.

Subordinate to ComAirPac, and charged with responsibility for Marine aviation's role in his sphere, was Major General Ross E. Rowell, commanding Marine Aircraft Wings, Pacific (MAWPac). In his training, administrative, and supply capacities, Rowell dealt with a comparable headquarters within Admiral Fitch's command, Marine Aircraft, South Pacific (MASP). With Admiral Halsey's approval, MASP was established on a tentative basis on 21 April 1943 to coordinate the administrative and logistical workload of the 1st and 2d MAWs. For almost a year, until 3 December, when the Commandant of the Marine Corps was finally successful in convincing Admiral King that a separate headquarters was necessary, the 1st Wing commander headed MASP also, using officers and men from the wing headquarters and service squadrons to handle the additional duties. Throughout the period when it was operating without a T/O sanctioned by CominCh, MASP was under Major General Ralph J. Mitchell.

Neither Mitchell's 1st Wing nor Mulcahy's 2d functioned as tactical or operational commands. In common with the higher air headquarters of other American services and that of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) in the South Pacific, the Marine wings and their descending chain of groups and squadrons were primarily concerned with the host of collateral duties necessary to get planes in the air, armed, fueled, and manned for a combat mission. ComAirSols, and the various operational task forces he set up, planned and controlled all sorties against the enemy in the combat area.[4]

[3] ComSoPac Serial 01369, dtd 16Aug43, Subj: Opns of SCAT, in SCAT Statistics and Correspondence, 1942–1944.

[4] The subdivision of the South Pacific into combat, forward, and rear areas is succinctly described in Ross, *RNZAF*, p. 135, as: "the Combat Area in which the Allied forces were in actual contact with the enemy; the Forward

The Army counterpart of MASP was the Thirteenth Air Force which came into being on 14 December 1942.[5] Throughout most of the Guadalcanal campaign, the Army Air Forces units fighting in the South Pacific were nominally part of the Seventh Air Force based in Hawaii. Actually, most of the administrative and logistical support of the AAF squadrons and groups was channeled through the headquarters of Major General Millard F. Harmon, Halsey's senior Army commander and a veteran pilot himself. Harmon was vitally interested in achieving closer control and coordination of these units and strongly urged Washington to authorize formation of a new air force. Adding impetus to his request was the general's feeling, shared at AAF headquarters, that the Navy was not utilizing Army aircraft, particularly heavy bombers, to their fullest combat potential.

While General Harmon "had no intention of capsizing the accepted principle of unity of command," he was interested in "gaining for the AAF full operational control of its own aircraft."[6] He wanted to insure that AAF views on proper employment of its planes and personnel were fully considered. He argued that "no one can build up a force, train it, dispose it, and supply it and be held responsible for its operational effectiveness without some direct contact and influence on operational control."[7] Both Admirals Halsey and Fitch supported General Harmon's request for a separate SoPac command of AAF units, and General Marshall, agreeing, designated them the Thirteenth Air Force. By 13 January, organizational work was far enough along so that headquarters squadrons for the force and its subordinate XIII Fighter and Bomber Commands could be activated. The Thirteenth's commander, Brigadier General Nathan F. Twining, and his staff set up for work close to Admiral Fitch's headquarters on Espiritu Santo.

For much the same reason that the Thirteenth located near ComAirSoPac—to have a strong voice in the employment of its aircraft—the RNZAF assigned a senior liaison officer to Fitch's staff. On 10 March 1943, after the New Zealand War Cabinet had decided to deploy most of the country's operational squadrons in the South Pacific's forward area, a suitable command echelon, No. 1 (Islands) Group under Group Captain Sidney Wallingford, was activated to administer the RNZAF units. At the time, one New Zealand bomber-reconnaissance squadron was flying from Guadalcanal and another from Espiritu Santo, and two fighter squadrons were getting ready to move up from rear area bases. As the RNZAF strength gradually built up during 1943, the New Zealanders took an increasingly prominent role in the drive to isolate Rabaul.

Navy planes, other than those flying from carriers, were administered by Commander, Fleet Aircraft, Noumea, an echelon on a par with MASP, Thirteenth Air

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Area which, although not in contact with the enemy, might be liable to attack, and which was organized for defense and for supporting operations in the Combat Area; and the Rear Area. As the campaign moved north, so did the boundaries of the respective areas."

[5] Dr. Robert F. Futrell, USAF HistDiv, ltr to Head, HistBr, G-3, HQMC, dtd 6Nov62.

[6] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 71.

[7] MajGen Millard F. Harmon, USA, ltr to Gen Henry H. Arnold, USA, dtd 25Nov42, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Force, and No. 1 (Islands) Group. Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher had the command during the last days of the Guadalcanal campaign and kept it until 4 April 1943, when Admiral Halsey designated him Admiral Mason's relief as ComAirSols. Like Mason, Mitscher brought relatively few staff officers with him and melded them easily into the existing command setup. Another Marine, Brigadier General Field Harris, became AirSols chief of staff to replace General Mulcahy, who went to New Zealand for a short, well-deserved rest before returning to the combat area and his next tactical assignment as ComAir New Georgia.

By the time Mitscher assumed command, AirSols had shaken down into the organizational pattern it was to follow throughout the air offensive against Rabaul—three major functional task forces: fighters; medium and heavy bombers; and light bombers and reconnaissance planes. Each command had its beginning with the mixed bag of aircraft and pilots, crewmen and mechanics, that had defended Guadalcanal as the Cactus Air Force, taking its name from the island's code name. In the urgent haste of getting anyone and everything that could fly and fight to Henderson Field, niceties of squadron and group organization and concerns with service of origin were often forgotten and usually ignored. The Marine command echelons that were on the island controlled all aircraft that were sent up from the rear area and employed them according to function and performance. General Mulcahy was the first island air commander to bring in a full wing operating staff and the first to have enough planes and personnel to warrant its employment.

In the course of the air battles over Guadalcanal and its surrounding seas, two task forces evolved, one composed of fighters and the other of everything else that would fly. Until 16 October 1942, when MAG–14 relieved MAG–23 as the administrative and maintenance agency at Henderson Field, Cactus Air Force was too small to worry about intermediate echelons of tactical command. The 1st MAW commander, General Geiger, and a small operations staff directly controlled all missions. Senior Marine fighter pilots, first Lieutenant Colonel William J. Wallace, then Lieutenant Colonel Harold W. Bauer, acted as fighter commanders, and, in like manner, the most experienced pilots of other aircraft types, regardless of service, helped plan and lead strikes. When most of MAG–23's surviving pilots and aircrews were pulled out of Guadalcanal in October for a rest and a training assignment in the States, Cactus Air Force had grown to a size and complexity that precluded Geiger's direct supervision of all flights.

On the arrival of MAG–14, its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Albert D. Cooley, was named to head an Air Search and Attack Command which would control all bombing, reconnaissance, and rescue operations. Direction of fighter activity, still largely an informal tactical arrangement, remained with Lieutenant Colonel Bauer. After Bauer was reported missing in action on 15 November, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel S. Jack took over as fighter commander. On 28 December, General Mulcahy, now heading Cactus Air, established a Fighter Command and confirmed Jack as its head. When Colonel William O. Brice relieved Lieutenant Colonel Cooley as Commanding Officer of

MAG–14 on 19 December, he also assumed command of Air Search and Attack.

In April, at the time Admiral Mitscher took over AirSols, MAG–14, in its turn, was due for a rest from combat; Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Pugh's [8] MAG–12 was in line to make the relief as Guadalcanal's top Marine administrative and logistical echelon. Mitscher decided to make MAG–12's commander responsible for running Fighter Command, and brought Marine Colonel Christian F. Schilt up from Admiral Fitch's staff to head a smaller but more easily controlled Air Search and Attack Command. Under Schilt, in what was soon known as Search and Strike Command and, by mid-summer, simply as Strike Command, were all dive and torpedo bombers and short-range reconnaissance planes. The aircraft types assigned to Strike Command insured that it would be primarily composed of Navy and Marine air crews, with a substantial leaven of New Zealanders.

At the same time the new Strike Command was formed, with its headquarters and most of its strength at Henderson Field, the medium and heavy bombers that had served under Cooley and Brice were concentrated under a separate task force at Carney Field near Koli Point. To head this Bomber Command, Admiral Mitscher approved the appointment of the Army's Colonel William A. Matheny. By reason of its assigned aircraft and personnel, Bomber Command was almost wholly an AAF organization, and its commander concurrently led XIII Bomber Command.

During the Allied approach to New Georgia and the first month of operations ashore, Admiral Mitscher continued to command AirSols. On 25 July, Admiral Halsey initiated a practise of rotating the top tactical air command among the various services, and Mitscher was relieved by the Thirteenth Air Force's commander, General Twining. Holding to the joint service nature of AirSols, Twining chose a Navy captain, Charles F. Coe, as his chief of staff and continued the assignments of many Navy and Marine officers who had been a part of Mitscher's command organization.[9] Twining's AirSols bomber chief was still Colonel Matheny, but Fighter Command went to the XIII Fighter Command's Brigadier General Dean C. Strother and Strike Command to Marine Lieutenant Colonel David F. O'Neill.

On their detachment, Admiral Mitscher and General Harris sent a message to Air Sols personnel addressed "to the best air force we know and the one best known to the Japs." [10] The organization they praised was clearly in the ascendency, already a good deal stronger than the *Eleventh Air Fleet* was or could hope to be. Although some of this Allied strength lay in increased allotments of planes and men, even more stemmed from a complete

[8] HqSq–14 Muster Roll, Apr43 (Unit Diary-Sect, RecsBr, PersDept, HQMC).

[9] "General Twining also chose a Marine aviator, Colonel William G. Manley, as his operations officer. Further, RNZAF Air Commodore Sidney Wallingford and his staff were attached to the AirSols staff (by direction of ComAirSoPac, I believe) for operational training, administrative, and logistical liaison with the RNZAF units operating directly under the operational control of AirSols task unit commanders. Thus the AirSols staff was both a joint and a combined air staff, composed of Army, Navy, Marine, and RNZAF officers." VAdm Charles F. Coe ltr to ACofS, G–3, HQMC, dtd 9Oct62.

[10] Quoted in Theodore Taylor, *The Magnificent Mitscher* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., Inc., 1954), p. 161.

reversal of form between opposing fighter aircraft. The fighter plane called the turn in the advance toward Rabaul, and the day of the Zeke had long passed. In its stead stood the Corsair, the Hellcat, and the Lightning.

ALLIED PLANES AND AIRCREWS [11]

One of the more significant events in the history of the air war in the Pacific was a crash landing on 3 June 1942 from which the plane emerged virtually intact. The pilot, a Japanese petty officer, was less fortunate and broke his neck. The plane, a Zero, had had its fuel line punctured by antiaircraft fire during a raid on the U.S. naval base at Dutch Harbor. When the luckless Japanese pilot was unable to get back to his carrier, the *Ryujo*, he attempted a landing on an isolated Aleutian island. Five weeks later, an American scouting party found the plane upside down in a marsh, its pilot dead in the cockpit.

The invaluable find, a new aircraft on its first combat mission, had been built at the Mitsubishi plant only four months before it went down. Returned to the States with careful haste, the plane was completely disassembled by engineers and technicians and rebuilt in its original undamaged condition ready for flight test. At San Diego, in the last months of 1942, the Zeke was skillfully flown against major American fighter aircraft to measure comparative performance and to fathom the Japanese plane's weaknesses. The findings were revealing and reinforced the combat experience of Allied pilots; in essence, they boiled down to one warning: "Never attempt to dog fight Zeke." [12]

While the tests revealed that the enemy fighter could out-maneuver any of its opponents at speeds below 300 miles per hour, they also confirmed defects cited in combat pilots' reports from the Pacific. The Zeke had comparatively poor diving ability, gave sluggish response to controls at high speed, and performed best at medium and low altitudes. The lack of armor for the pilot and the inflammable fuel supply both emphasized the experience of the leading Marine ace at Guadalcanal, Captain Joseph J. Foss, who stated: "If you hit a Zero at the base of its wing, it's just POW! and it disintegrates." [13] The response to these findings was twofold, to accelerate production of new American fighters that could clearly outclass the Zeke, and to emphasize aerial

[11] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *USAAF InfoIntel Summary* No. 85, Flight Characteristics of the Japanese Zero Fighter Zeke, dtd Mar43; "Flight Characteristics of the Japanese Type Zero Mk II Fighter Hap," in *USAAF InfoIntelSummary* No. 43–45, dtd 30Sep43; Technical AirIntelCen, NAS, Anacostia, Representative Enemy and Allied Aircraft: Comparative Performance and Statistics, TAIC Manual No. 2 (OpNav–16–V #T302), dtd Oct44; Buchanan, *Navy's Air War*: Ross, *RNZAF*; Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *Men and Planes—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 6 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*; Sherrod, *MarAirHist*; Ray Wagner, *American Combat Planes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Hanover House, 1960).

[12] *USAAF InfoIntelSummary* No. 85, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[13] Quoted in "Lessons Learned in Combat with Jap Pilots," in *USAAF InfoIntelSummary* No. 40–43, dtd 10Aug43, p. 3.

combat tactics that took full advantage of the Japanese plane's limitations.

The more important Allied fighters that met the enemy attack as part of Cactus Air Force were the F4F (Grumman Wildcat) flown by the Navy and Marine Corps, and the Army's P–38 (Lockheed Lightning), P–39 (Bell Airacobra), and P–40 (Curtiss Warhawk). After the fighting on Guadalcanal ended, two new American planes began to make their appearance; one, the new standard Navy fighter, the F6F (Grumman Hellcat), and the other—the plane that was to become synonymous with Marine air for the next decade—the F4U (Chance-Vought Corsair). Like all military aircraft, these planes underwent constant modification and improvement, and the various models that fought the Japanese carried a steadily changing array of identifying numbers and letters. In general, it should be remembered that each new version of a basic plane type could do a little more than its predecessor, fly a bit faster, climb higher, or carry a greater pay load or heavier armament.

The system used by the Navy to designate its aircraft gave a letter to denote function, followed by the number of that type made by a particular company, then gave the manufacturer's code and any model numbers and letters: *e.g.*, F4U–1C, the third version (C) of the first model of the fourth fighter (F) manufactured by Chance-Vought (U).[14] The Army Air Forces used a letter function symbol with a number to indicate sequence within a type; letters appended to the number indicated the model: *e.g.*, P–38H, the eighth model (H) of the thirty-eighth fighter (P) accepted by the AAF.[15] While Allied pilots and aircrews were vitally interested in the improved performance indicated by the modification symbols, the basic designations were in more common usage and were employed interchangeably with the colorful names chosen by the manufacturers or the service concerned.

The Wildcat, a stubby, mid-wing monoplane, was the mainstay of Navy and Marine fighter strength for the first 18 months of the war. Slow, when measured against its opponents, the F4F could make about 320 miles per hour at its best altitude, 19,400 feet. With a maximum fuel load, the plane had a total range of 1,100 miles, well under the Zeke's capability; its normal combat range was 770 miles. The Wildcat was sturdily built and was equipped with self-sealing fuel tanks and armor for its vitals so that it could absorb terrific punishment. As one Marine pilot noted, "a Zero can't take two seconds' fire from a Grumman, and a Grumman can sometimes take as high as fifteen minutes' fire from a Zero."[16] As it could take it, the American carrier fighter could also dish it out, and the destructive impact of the fire of its six .50 caliber wing guns blasted hundreds of enemy planes to pieces.

Grumman's successor to the F4F, its production accelerated by the menace of the Zeke, was the F6F Hellcat, which had

[14] *Marine Corps Aircraft 1913–1960—Marine Corps Historical Reference Series No. 20* (Washington: HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, 1961) p. 22.

[15] Army aircraft functional symbols were: A (Attack), B (Bombardment), C (Cargo), F (Photographic), L (Liaison), P (Pursuit), and T (Training). The Navy used: B (Bomber), F (Fighter), J (Utility), N (Training), O (Observation), P (Patrol), R (Transport), S (Scout), and T (Torpedo).

[16] Quoted in Sherrod, *MarAirHist*, p. 83.

greater speed, increased range (but still not as much as the Japanese fighter), and improved maneuverability. In high compliment to its performance, the Japanese considered it to be "the only aircraft that could acquit itself with distinction in a fighter-*vs.*-fighter dogfight." [17] In appearance, the Hellcat resembled its predecessor, having the same thick-bodied fuselage and square-tipped wings with a cockpit canopy set high over the fuel tanks between the wing roots. The armament was the same, but the ammunition load was greater, and the F6F was even better protected from enemy fire. The plane could make 375 miles per hour at 17,500 feet, had a climbing rate of 3,500 feet a minute, and a service ceiling of 37,300 feet.

Developed simultaneously with the F6F, the F4U had poor downward visibility (corrected in later models) and a relatively high landing speed, both attributes that made it unattractive as a carrier fighter. While the Navy was hesitant about using the Corsair, the Marines were enthusiastic. The distinctive-looking, gull-winged monoplane was produced in such quantity that all Marine fighter squadrons in the Pacific were equipped with it by July 1943. The powerful Corsair drew a high rating when flown against the captured Zeke in the San Diego tests, with the findings: "Zeke is far inferior to the F4U–1 in level and diving speeds at all altitudes. It is inferior in climb at sea level, and inferior above 20,000 feet . . . Zeke cannot stay with the F4U in high speed climbs." [18] In combat, the disparity of performance proved equally wide; the Japanese called the Corsair "the first single-engine American fighter seriously to challenge the Zero." [19] The F4U's top speed was 417 miles per hour at 20,000 feet; it had a normal range of 1,015 miles with a maximum double that. Armed like the F6F with six wing-mounted .50s, and protected by armor and self-sealing tanks, the Corsair was deadly when flown by an experienced pilot.

Tactics developed to counter the Zeke's maneuverability capitalized on the uniformly high diving performance of American planes, and the mutual protection of two-plane sections fighting as a team and keeping each other's tail clear of enemy attackers. One plane that was singularly proficient in the high speed diving engagement was the AAF's P–38. The two-engined fighter with its distinguishing twin tail booms was designed for high altitude interception and clearly outclassed the Zeke above 20,000 feet, where it could hit maximum speeds just over 400 miles per hour. After making the initial mistake of trying to fight the Zeke on its own terms, Lightning pilots soon learned to fly high out of reach and dive to the attack, firing a nose concentration of four .50s and a 20mm cannon. The plunging dive, launched at the attackers' initiative, carried through Japanese formations and away at speeds that left little chance of being tagged by pursuers. The P–38 was capable of performing a wide variety of tasks and was particularly good as a reconnaissance and photographic plane, since it had a range of 1,500 miles with full tanks and was almost invulnerable to air attack so long as it flew above the Zeke's service ceiling.

[17] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 222.

[18] *USAAF InfoIntelSummary* No. 85, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[19] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 221.

The Army's utility fighters were the P–39 and P–40, which went through continual redesign and improvement and fought throughout the war, although in gradually decreasing numbers. Both low-wing monoplanes carried the same engine, one that limited effective operations to heights below 15,000 feet. The Airacobra's engine was mounted behind the pilot and the Warhawk's was in the nose; the engine airscoop immediately behind the P–39's cockpit enclosure and the P–40's deep-throated intake under its engine gave each aircraft one of its primary identifying characteristics. Neither plane was particularly fast, the Airacobra could hit 368 miles per hour at maximum efficiency and the Warhawk 350, but both aircraft could out-dive and pull away from the Zeke at lower altitudes. Beyond that accomplishment, Allied pilots (Commonwealth air forces used the P–40 extensively, calling it the Kittyhawk) relied on superior flying skill and wingman protection when jumped by Japanese fighters. The two planes proved to be particularly suited for low-level ground support as strafers and fighter-bombers and saw most use in the latter part of the war in that role. The P–39 delivered a heavy punch with a 37mm gun in its nose firing through a hollow propeller shaft and two .30 and four .50 caliber machine guns in its wings; the P–40 carried the common American fighter armament of six .50s.

When the Lightnings and Corsairs came into common use, the pattern for the AirSols offensive deployed each type at the altitude where it performed best. A typical large-scale raid late in 1943 with bombers at 20,000 feet would have P–39s or P–40s furnishing low cover and P–38s flying at about 30–34,000 feet; between the bombers and the Lightnings would be F4Us in staggered layers of four to eight planes weaving over an area two to four miles wide. No matter where the Japanese attacked, they had to penetrate a screen of fighters operating at maximum efficiency and be ever wary of the escorts waiting to dive on them from above.

One of the mainstays of naval aviation in World War II, the dive bomber, found little favor with the AAF. The Navy's SBD–3, the Douglas Dauntless, was tried out as the A–24 in New Guinea in 1942 and won a verdict of "too slow, too limited in range, and too vulnerable to enemy fighters" from Army pilots.[20] The Army's further development of light bombers tended, thereafter, to concentrate on fighters equipped as bombers. While recognizing the faults of the SBD and working to replace it with a better aircraft, the Navy found it effective as a carrier-borne attack plane, and the Marines were sold on its accuracy against both shipping and point targets ashore. The Dauntless, a single-engine low-wing monoplane with a thick body and a narrow upswept tail, carried a crew of two, a pilot and a radioman-gunner. For defense, the gunner manned a pair of flexible mounted .30s firing to the rear from the cockpit enclosure, and the pilot controlled two .50s fixed in the nose. The dive bomber had a range of 1,345 miles with a 1,000-pound bomb load and 1,580 miles when used as a scout; its best speed was 250 miles per hour at 16,000 feet. Since, like all American combat aircraft, the SBD carried protective armor and self-sealing tanks, it was not nearly as vulnerable to Japanese fighters as was the Val, its enemy counterpart, to Allied hunters.

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[20] Craven and Cate, *Men and Planes, op. cit.*, p. 198.

Unlike the hapless Kate, the American Navy's standard torpedo bomber throughout most of the war was a relatively high performance aircraft. The TBF (Grumman Avenger) had a top speed of 271 miles per hour at 12,000 feet and made only a few miles less when it was carrying its internally stowed torpedo. Fat-bodied, with a long canopied cockpit ending in a power-operated turret for a .50 caliber machine gun, the TBF looked a little like the Wildcat from below. More than one Japanese pilot weak on plane recognition discovered to his sorrow that the difference between the two Grummans included a ventral-mounted .30 caliber machine gun manned by the bombardier. To round off the plane's armament, the pilot at first had a .30 mounted in the engine cowling and, in later modifications, a pair of .50s mounted in the wings. The Avenger's combat range with a 1,760-pound torpedo was 1,215 miles.

In the early stages of the war, the Navy relied on its flying boats for planes that could deliver a heavier bomb load than the carriers' SBDs and TBFs. These patrol bombers, the PBY (Consolidated Catalina), PB2Y (Consolidated Coronado), and PBM (Martin Mariner), were excellent for sea search and anti-submarine work and invaluable in rescuing downed flyers; properly fitted for the job, they made effective cargo and personnel transports. The PBYs, when equipped with radar for night reconnaissance and bombing, were justly famed as the Black Cats, that made darkness a misery for outlying Japanese garrisons and the vessels that tried to supply them. All the flying boats, however, were slow and prime game for enemy fighters and antiaircraft gunners. As a result, in areas where Japanese planes swarmed, better armed and protected Army heavy bombers had to be used for reconnaissance missions, a fact that bothered AAF commanders who felt that their planes should be employed in their primary bombardment function. Eventually, as more aircraft were manufactured, the Navy procured land bombers, and the majority of its patrol planes in the latter stages of the war were land-based.

When the Navy did get four-engine land bombers, it took the AAF's B–24 (Consolidated Liberator) in both a twin-tail (PB4Y) and single-tail (PB4Y–2) version. After 1942, the Liberator gradually succeeded the B–17 (Boeing Flying Fortress) in the South Pacific campaign against Rabaul. The Fortress, aptly named for its guns and armor, could fight its way through to a target and home again, but its practical combat range was less than 800 miles when fully loaded and its bomb capacity was relatively small. General Harmon wanted the B–24 for Halsey's command because it could carry a larger bomb load over a longer distance and still hold its own with Japanese interceptors.

While the Liberator was not quite as strong defensively as the Fortress, it carried ten .50 caliber machine guns in flexible single mounts or paired in power turrets, and its 10-man crew could put up a whale of a battle. With a range of 2,850 miles carrying a 2,500-pound bomb load and 2,000 miles with 8,000 pounds, a speed of 287 miles per hour at 26,700 feet, and a service ceiling of 32,600 feet, the B–24 was also a formidable offensive weapon. One experienced Japanese fighter commander who fought in the Solomons

termed the B–17 and the B–24, "the most difficult" aircraft for Zekes to shoot down.[21]

The AAF was pre-eminent in the medium bombardment field, and two of its bombers, much alike in performance, were used extensively in the Pacific—the B–25 (North American Mitchell) and B–26 (Martin Marauder). Both were twin-engine monoplanes with the same top speed, 285 miles per hour, and a bomb capacity that crept steadily upward during the fighting to reach 4,000 pounds carried over a 1,200-mile range by 1945. Medium bombers specialized in strafing and low-level bombing runs, and, as a result, both planes were flying arsenals with their six-man crews firing as many as 12 .50 caliber machine guns, and, in the B–25's case, often a 75mm nose cannon to boot. The Marauder, a sleek high-wing, needle-like aircraft, was plagued with troubles when it was first introduced and won a reputation as a difficult plane to fly and fight. In contrast, the Mitchell, a twin-tail, mid-wing plane that looked a lot like the Liberator, was a pilots' favorite. It was the B–25, rechristened the PBJ by the Navy, that the Marines adopted and used extensively during the last year of the war.

The Navy and Army used many of the same planes in another category, transports. The majority of the aircraft that were employed were military versions of one prewar commercial model, the Douglas twin-engine DC–3, which could carry a cargo payload of as much as 10,000 pounds or a 6,500-pound passenger load. The Army called this plane the C–47 (Skytrain) and the Navy dubbed it the R4D, but by any name it was the workhorse of the air, dependable and employed everywhere. The four-engine Douglas DC–4, the Army's C–54 (Skymaster), saw limited use by the Navy as the R5D, but, as the larger plane was in limited supply, in its stead the Coronado and Mariner were successfully adapted to haul cargo and passengers. Marine transport squadrons used the R4D, which, unarmed and unarmored, flew at considerable risk in the combat areas of the Pacific.

One aircraft problem, shared by all the services, and never adequately solved until late in the war, was the development of an effective night fighter. Although conventional fighters working with ground searchlights were occasionally able to down night intruders, the score was not impressive. What was needed was a fast plane equipped with radar and capable of reaching high altitudes that could work with ground controllers to find and destroy enemy attackers. For their first night fighter, the Marines reluctantly chose the twin-tail PV–1 (Vega Ventura), which was the best aircraft they could get for the job in October 1942 when the first VMF(N) squadron began forming. The plane had a rated service ceiling of 26,300 feet and a practical one well below that, and the fact that many interceptions would occur above 25,000 feet was well recognized. The Ventura, used by the Navy as a patrol plane, was a twin-engine mid-wing monoplane that could perform adequately as a low-altitude medium bomber; in its night fighter version, the plane carried radar and six .50 caliber machine guns in its nose. The men who crewed the night fighters were highly

[21] LCdr Mitsugu Kofukada, IJN, quoted in Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 226.

trained,[22] a description that fitted all of the Allied pilots and aircrews who were fighting in the Pacific at the time of the air offensive against Rabaul.

When the war started, American service pilots, particularly the men in command billets, were veterans of hundreds of hours of flying in all types of aircraft. Fledgling pilots and aircrewmen underwent an extensive training program before they ever joined a squadron, and kept on learning after they reported for duty. With wartime expansion, many easier-paced schedules of prewar years were discarded, but the concept of extensive ground and flight schooling was retained. In many instances in the early part of the war, when American aircraft were no better than on a par with their opponents and often no real match at all, pilot skill was all that could be relied upon. A continuous stream of experienced flying personnel returned to the States from the active war theaters to instruct the men in training and pass on life-saving tips of aerial combat. In the case of Marine trainees, who had only one adversary to get to know, all indoctrination was concentrated on beating the Japanese.

After 1942, most naval pilots were the products of a training system which included pre-flight school for basic instruction and physical conditioning, followed by three months of primary training about equally divided between ground and flight school. Next phase in the program was intermediate training, 14 weeks at Pensacola or Corpus Christi mainly spent flying, at the end of which successful students were designated naval aviators (officers) or naval aviation pilots (enlisted men), the latter group a very small percentage of the whole. At this point, Marine pilots went to Cherry Point or El Toro to begin at least two months of operational training in high performance aircraft of the type they would fly in combat, and Navy pilots reported to naval commands for similar instruction.

The Army Air Forces pilot training program was closely akin to the system used by the Navy with a primary indoctrination course, then basic flying school, followed by advanced school, and completed with transition training to handle combat aircraft. After transition, a new Army pilot, like his Navy and Marine counterpart, had 140–150 hours flying time behind him and the expectation that he would add many more before he met the enemy. The requirements for aircrewmen and mechanics of all the services were met in a manner similar to pilot training: multi-stage courses, tailored to job requirements, concluded with practice work on combat aircraft before assignment to operational units.

Once they had joined a combat squadron, new Allied flying personnel could count on the fact that they would not be expended by unbroken action. Unlike most Japanese flyers, who had to fight until exhaustion hastened their end in battle, Allied pilots and aircrews were given regular respites from the intense strain of combat flying. In Halsey's area, after a Marine squadron fought for four to six weeks under ComAirSols, it moved to the rear area while combat crews were given a week's leave in Sydney or Auckland, and then, after two weeks to a month spent training and absorbing replacements at Efate or Espiritu Santo, the squadron

[22] Sherrod, *MarAirHist*, devotes a chapter (pp. 158–169) to the development, training, and employment of Marine night fighter squadrons which gives an interesting picture of the problems overcome.

went back into action. The benefit of such a program, common to all Allied air units once the first desperate days of understrength, shortage-plagued fighting were over, was incalculable. Although it gave rise to envious and often ribald comment from ground troops, the system of combat air crew rotation to rest centers undeniably saved lives. While it was impossible to give every combat veteran in the South and Southwest Pacific a vacation from war with a taste of civilization and a temperate climate thrown in, it was feasible for flying personnel. The privilege paid off, as it was intended to, in increased operational efficiency and prolonged combat employment of veteran squadrons.

NORTHWEST FROM HENDERSON FIELD [23]

In reconstructing the course of aerial operations during CARTWHEEL, the historian is necessarily struck with the wide disparity between claimed and admitted losses by both sides.[24] Overclaiming was a common fault, and contemporary public accounts as well as many memoirs based on such material are poor sources of relative scores. A reasonably accurate picture of the results of air action can be established, however, by using Allied official reports for Allied losses and captured documents, helped out by postwar assessments, for the toll of damage to the Japanese.

Some of the inflated statistics published by the enemy can be traced to a losing side's natural eagerness to accept the most glowing pilots' victory reports and to an equal reluctance to release news of plummeting strength. Allied commands had less excuse for exaggerated totals, since concerted efforts were made to cross-check claim and counterclaim in order to keep accurate tallys.[25] Most AirSols flyers prided themselves on asking credit for

[23] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: ComAirPac Analysis of AirOps, Central, South, and SoWesPac, Oct43, dtd 22Nov43, and Nov43, dtd 24Dec43, hereafter *ComAirPac Analysis* with appropriate months; *SoPac ACI Repts; StrikeComd WarDs; ThirteenthAF Data; SE Area NavOps—III; SE Area NavAirOps—IV;* [BuDocks] *Building the Navy's Bases in World War II—History of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the Civil Engineer Corps,* v. II (Washington, 1947); Buchanan, *Navy's Air War;* Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Ross, *RNZAF;* Sherrod, *MarAirHist.*

[24] The difficulty of reconciling opposing figures is well illustrated by a ComAirSoPac comparison of Japanese and Allied claims and admissions of losses during four air battles of mid-1943 (*SoPac ACI Rept,* 10–16Oct43, p. 3):

Date	Japanese loss reports		Allied loss reports	
	Own	Allied	Own	Japanese
1 Apr 43	9	57	6	16
6 Jun 43	9	41	7	23
12 Jun 43	7	24	6	26
16 Aug 43	17	27	3	27

[25] The conclusion of the Army's historian of the CARTWHEEL campaign regarding both sides' claims of damage to ships and planes is: "First, Japanese claims were wildly exaggerated whereas American claims were merely exaggerated. Second, Japanese commanders apparently took the claims seriously, so that nonexistent victories often served as the basis for decision. On the other hand, American commanders, taking human frailty into account, evaluated and usually scaled down claims so that decisions were normally based on more realistic estimates of damage." Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul,* p. 232.

nothing but sure kills and observed hits, yet the nature of air warfare is such that a hasty backward glance from a swiftly maneuvering plane was often all the confirmation possible of a claim. Under the circumstances, all manner of targets were "destroyed" several times over. Nowhere was this tendency more pronounced than in air combat, for, as the historian of Marine aviation in the Pacific has cogently observed:

> Nothing is more difficult than an accurate count during an air battle in which several dozen planes are involved; it is very easy for two pilots to claim the same plane at which both are shooting. The smoking plane may get back to its base; it may not even have been actually smoking.[26]

The flashing complexity of a single aerial affray illustrates the difficulty of reconstructing a history containing a succession of such combats. The snarling tangle of interceptors and escorts is, however, only a part of the story, although it is often the part that seizes the imagination and overbalances many popular narrations. A review of air operations lends itself all too easily to a style of telling that places the individual in the forefront, somtimes to the neglect of the group effort. Certainly the highlighted pilot ace and the sharpshooting bomber crew were invaluable, and there is no disposition to downgrade their vital skills and example here, but the larger framework in which they acted will be the theme of this account.

From a Marine aviator's viewpoint, and indeed from that of many other AirSols flyers, 12 March 1943 was the start of a new chapter in the air war against the Japanese. The day marked the debut of the Corsair as a combat plane, as Major William E. Gise led VMF–124's flight echelon up from Espiritu Santo to Henderson Field. There was work for the gull-winged fighters immediately as 12 of the pilots, with only a hasty briefing on Solomons topography, flew escort for a rescue mission to Vella Lavella. Next day, the F4Us made the 600-mile round trip to Bougainville as part of the escort for B–24s attacking shipping at Buin. A similar mission on the 14th ran into about 50 Zekes over Kahili, and the meeting was not a happy one for AirSols. One Corsair was shot down and another lost in a collision with an enemy fighter. Japanese naval pilots also accounted for two of the P–40s flying low, two of the heavy bombers, and the whole top cover, four P–38s. The total enemy loss was three Zekes.

Fortunately, this inauspicious beginning was not a portent of the Corsair's future performance. The Marine pilots were new to the plane, new to combat, and had far less operational flying time, 20 hours on the average,[27] than was the case with men who arrived later in the year as replacements and reinforcements.[28] It took a little while for the F4U and the

[26] Sherrod, *MarAirHist*, p. 201.

[27] Air Technical AnalysisDiv, CNO, Interview with 1stLt Kenneth Walsh, USMC (OpNav–35 #E17), dtd 23Nov43, in MASP Survival and Interviews folder.

[28] Speaking of these later pilots from all the services, the Strike Command operations officer commented: "The efforts of operational training in the various training commands have paid a high dividend. Young pilots who haven't flown much can be given a mission that two years before the war wouldn't have been given to a division of squadron commanders." AirIntelGru, DivNavIntel, CNO, Interview of LCdr H. H. Larsen, USN (OpNav–16–V #E31), dtd 27Feb44, pp. 1–2.

men who flew it to get completely shaken down in combat, but when Admiral Yamamoto launched his *I Go* attacks in early April, the Corsairs were ready and able to meet the best pilots and planes the Japanese could send up. Confidence in the F4U grew as its record of victories mounted, and pilots could say as one veteran did; "The Corsair was a sweet-flying baby if ever I flew one. No longer would we have to fight the Nip's fight, for we could make our own rules." [29] Respected but unregretted, the Marines' Wildcats swiftly passed from the scene, and, by 2 July, all eight of the fighter squadrons under MASP were flying Corsairs.[30]

One of the greatest assets of the F4U was its range; unlike the F4F, the swifter fighter could cover the distance from Guadalcanal to southern Bougainville and return, carrying fuel to spare for air combat. Since it flew best at the altitude where Zekes were wont to intercept, the Corsair eased the lot of the Warhawks and Lightnings, letting each type fly at a height where it was on a par with or superior to the enemy fighter. With adequate escort available, daylight raids by Liberators and Fortresses on targets at Ballale, Buin, and Kahili increased. Fighter sweeps into the northern Solomons were flown regularly.

Japanese airfields closer to Guadalcanal, Munda, and the little-used liaison strip at Vila, were not neglected, however, while the heavy bombers and long-legged fighters ranged beyond the New Georgia Group. Strike Command sent a steady procession of SBDs and TBFs to New Georgia, accompanied by AirSol's usual varied collection of fighters, to keep the enemy runways bomb-cratered and their defending gun crews fearful. Despite the pounding it took, the Japanese kept Munda in use as an emergency strip, and its threat was constant. Any letup in the Allied air attacks and Rabaul's 300-plane garrison could begin staging raids through Munda to hit the swelling complex of fields on Guadalcanal.

Without auxiliary tanks, Navy and Marine dive bombers could not join in attacks on Bougainville targets and return with safety, but torpedo bombers could make the trip and did. The TBFs were used primarily on night harassing missions, hitting shipping and airfield installations by flare light. Enemy attempts at interception, using day fighters and searchlights to locate targets, were even less successful than similar Allied attempts.

Aside from their more common employment as bombers, the Avengers were occasionally used for another type of mission, offensive aerial mining, with results hard to assess. On the night of 20 March, Major John W. Sapp led 42 TBFs from his own VMSB-143 [31] and three Navy squadrons up to Bougainville to mine the waters off Buin-Kahili. While 18 Army heavy bombers dropped clusters of fragmentation bombs on shore targets and attracted the attention of searchlights and antiaircraft, the TBFs slipped down to 1,500 feet and parachuted a pattern of 1,600-pound magnetic mines into the enemy harbor. None of the Avengers was hit, and the entire raiding force got back

[29] Col Gregory Boyington, *Baa! Baa! Black Sheep* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 129.

[30] VMF-213 got its new F4Us on 11 March, VMF-121 on 15 April, VMF-112 and -221 on 19 May, VMF-122 on 16 June, VMF-214 on 19 June, and VMF-123 on 2 July.

[31] VMSB-143 was redesignated VMTB-143 on 31 May 1943.

safely. On the following night, 40 torpedo bombers and 21 B–17s and B–24s mounted another mining strike to the same area; again the Japanese went scoreless.

Careful study by the Navy indicates that this mine plant probably claimed two merchantmen and damaged a destroyer, but the results of mining in poorly charted enemy waters can never be completely known. Admiral Halsey was pleased enough with the reported damage to order a resumption of aerial mining in May, and on the 19th, 30 TBFs from VMSB–143 and VT–11, with a supporting flight of six heavy bombers carrying 100-pound fragmentation bombs, sortied for Buin-Kahili. This time enemy antiaircraft ignored the relatively light diversionary attack and concentrated search lights and guns on the TBFs as they parachuted their mines. The Navy and the Marine squadron each lost two planes to the hail of defending fire. On 20 May, four Liberators and four Fortresses with a mixed load of 100- and 300-pound bombs, accompanied 30 mine-laden Avengers to the Shortlands. Surprised by the Allied attack, the Japanese engaged the bombers and devoted little fire to the mining planes; all TBFs returned to base after laying their deadly cargo. The Avenger crews felt themselves lucky to have escaped whole, as the enemy fire was heavy and the mined area was close inshore.

A final mission of the mining program, the target again Buin-Kahili waters, was mounted on 23 May. About midnight on the 22d, while the main striking force was taking off from Guadalcanal, five B–24s hit Kahili's airstrip and defenses, breaking off their attack when a flight of 14 B–17s arrived to hit shore defenses during the mining run. Of 26 TBFs employed, only 20 carried mines, while two Navy and four Marine planes each had a load of four 500-pound bombs. Two of these Marine Avengers served as prowlers, unsuccessfully seeking enemy shipping during the attack, and the remaining bomb-loaded torpedo planes attacked searchlights and antiaircraft positions on offshore islands. The bombing was effective; enemy fire was erratic and probing lights were knocked out almost as soon as they flashed on. No AirSols planes were downed, and all returned without mishap, helped along the way by the flares that a RNZAF Hudson (Lockheed PBO) dropped near Vella Lavella as navigational aids.[32]

One of the mines of this series was credited with causing damage to the enemy light cruiser *Yubari* on 5 July, but otherwise nothing definite was learned of the mission's success. TBFs were not used for mine laying again until after the Bougainville landing, but Strike Command had learned that aerial mining in constricted and heavily defended waters required effective supporting and diversionary attacks. Many Avenger pilots were convinced that, without such support, losses among mine-laying planes would be prohibitive.

The more usual run of Allied air raids on Buin-Kahili and the Shortlands stepped up appreciably after the Seabee-constructed airfields in the Russells opened for business. The advance echelon of Lieutenant Colonel Raymond E. Hopper's MAG–21 landed on Banika on 14 March, the rest of the group arrived on 4 April, and the first of the island's two fields was unofficially christened on the 13th, two days before its completion, when a dam-

[32] CO, StrikeComd, AirSols ltr to ComAirSols, dtd 29May43, Subj: Mine laying in Kahili and Shortland Island Areas.

aged P–38 made an emergency landing. By the time both airstrips were in full operation in late June, MAG–21's three fighter squadrons were being employed primarily as escorts for bombers with interception scrambles limited to the intrusion of an occasional snooper picked up on radar.

Following the enemy's unsuccessful *I Go* attacks of early April, Japanese fighters and bombers steered clear of Guadalcanal in daylight for several weeks. Then on 25 April, a force of 16 Bettys and 20–25 Zekes was spotted southeast of New Georgia by a flight of four Corsairs led by Major Monfurd K. Peyton. The Marine planes, all from VMF–213, were returning to base from a strafing mission at Vila. When the F4Us circled to intercept the bomber formation, they were jumped by enemy fighters, but bore in despite the odds. Five Zekes were gunned down in the resulting affray and two Corsairs and one pilot were lost, but the entire Japanese attack formation was turned back.

While daylight raids were scarce, enemy night attacks on Guadalcanal and Banika, sometimes in formations as large as eight bombers, were frequent. The physical damage done on such visits was meager, but the wear and tear on nerves and tempers was great, and many a fervent wish for an effective night fighter was voiced by troops chased into trenches and dugouts by "Condition Red" alerts. A squadron of the AAF's first night fighters, P–70s, which began operating from Guadalcanal in March was generally ineffective, as the plane could not operate at the heights where enemy bombers flew. Lightnings practiced in night work easily reach the required altitude and occasionally flamed an unwary raider caught in the glare of probing searchlights, but a lack of airborne radar limited the P–38s' effectiveness. Not until late fall, when the first Navy and Marine night fighter squadrons began operating in the South Pacific did the Allies achieve control of the skies over their positions at night as well as in daytime. The dawn-to-dusk mastery of the air by AirSols interceptors was conclusively demonstrated in the bloody repulse of the series of raids which the Japanese launched against Guadalcanal between 7 and 16 June 1943.

Reinforced by 58 fighters and 49 bombers that the *Combined Fleet* transferred from Truk to Rabaul on 10 May, the *Eleventh Air Fleet* sought to check the Allies' aggressive air attacks by hitting at the ultimate source of AirSols offensive strength, its fighters. On 7 June, Admiral Kusaka sent approximately 80 Zekes, a number of them new Hamp models with bombs carried under the wings, flying toward the Russells and spoiling for a fight. Warned by coastwatchers, Fighter Command obliged the enemy naval pilots by sending up more game than they wanted, 104 interceptors, with about half deployed over the shipping at Guadalcanal and the rest stacked in layers between the Russells and New Georgia. For about an hour and a half, Japanese and Allied fighters tangled in a blinding rain storm all over a 50-mile-long battle zone. Finally, after the defenders shot down 23 Zekes, and antiaircraft guns on Banika accounted for a 24th,[33] the raid was turned

[33] Postwar research by Japanese military historians indicates that nine carrier fighters failed to return from this attack and five were heavily damaged. Chief, WarHistOff, DefAgency of Japan, ltr to Head, HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 29Mar63, hereafter *Japanese Air Comments.*

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back short of Henderson Field. Allied losses were seven fighters in combat, with all pilots recovered but one, and two planes crashed as a result of the foul weather.

On 12 June, Admiral Kusaka again tried a fighter sweep with about 50 Zekes and experienced the same dismal failure. Intercepted north and west of the Russells by 49 Allied fighters of the 90 scrambled, the Japanese attacking force lost half its strength before it turned back.[34] Five American fighters were downed and one RNZAF P–40; four of the pilots survived to be picked up by rescue amphibians. Coastwatchers reported Japanese bombers had come south past Bougainville during the day, but none showed up in the lower Solomons when the Zekes failed to clear a path.

Despite its heavy losses, a month's allotment of replacement aircraft in two days of combat, the *Eleventh Air Fleet* staged a third big attack on 16 June. Prompted by sightings of large numbers of ships moving into the waters off Guadalcanal during the build-up for the TOENAILS operation, Admiral Kusaka this time sent at least 24 dive bombers along with 70 of his fighters. Amply forewarned by coastwatchers, and vectored into position by New Zealand ground intercept radar, AirSols fighters virtually destroyed the raiding force. Seventy-four of the 104 planes sent aloft by Fighter Command made contact, and no two accounts agree on the exact total of damage, but one thing is certain, the relative score was incredibly high in favor of the defenders. AirSols pilots originally claimed 49 Zekes and 32 Vals; ship and ground antiaircraft fire added 17 planes to that count. Six Allied fighters were destroyed and five pilots were lost. The few bombers that got through to Guadalcanal before they were shot out of the sky damaged one cargo ship sufficiently to force it ashore and set an LST afire. Enemy records are curiously blank regarding this raid; there is no doubt, however, that the number of planes that got back to Rabaul was woefully low. One lucky survivor who returned with tales of substantial Allied shipping losses found no witness to substantiate or dispute his fable.[35]

The *Eleventh Air Fleet* had no time to lick its wounds and recover. Less than a week after the 16 June attack, Marine raiders landed at Segi, heralding the launching of the drive to seize Munda airfield. Reacting to the grave threat posed by Allied seizure of bases in the New Georgia Group, Kusaka threw every plane he had against the attacking forces. To give his subordinate badly needed reinforcements, Admiral Koga ordered the air groups of the *2d Carrier Division* at Truk forward to Kahili. The commitment of 150 additional Zekes, Vals, and Kates to the Solomons air battles, a move that crippled the offensive power of the *Combined Fleet*, precipitated violent air action, but had little overall effect on the outcome of the campaign. The balance of air power was now so overwhelmingly

[34] According to recent Japanese research, "77 Zero fighters took off to engage in the aerial combat on June 12, of which 3 turned back to their base without getting to their destination. Thus, the Japanese lost 6 Zero Fighters and one fighter made an emergency landing." *Ibid.*

[35] Cited in Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*, p. 140. The Japanese War History Office indicates that 13 Vals and 12 Zekes failed to return from this attack. *Japanese Air Comments.*

with AirSols that the final result could not be doubted.

The imbalance was found not only in relative quantity and quality of aircraft, but also in what the enemy *6th Attack Force* commander called the "world of difference between the ability of the Japanese and Americans to construct air bases in the combat theaters." [36] While taking judicious note that most Japanese forward airbases had been built and maintained by "primitive manpower," in contrast to those that seemed to be the product of "mass mechanical invasion on jungle, coral, and rock," the enemy officer made an even more significant assessment, recalling:

> One of the major points which has too often been overlooked in an evaluation of fighting power, but which determined to a large extent the efficiency of air units, was that of hygienic installations. Japanese engineers paid scant attention to this problem, dismissing the pressing matter of mosquito protection by simply rigging mosquito nets in personnel quarters. Sanitary facilities were basically crude and ineffective; certainly they contributed nothing to the morale of ground and air crews.
>
> The Americans, by contrast, swept clean vast areas surrounding their ground installations with advanced mechanical aids. Through exhaustive disinfecting operations, they banished flies and mosquitos from their airbases and paid similar attention to every phase of sanitation and disease.
>
> Some may consider this a prosaic matter, but it was vital to the men forced to live on desert islands and in the midst of jungles swarming with disease and insect life. The inevitable outcome of such neglect was a tremendous difference in the health of the American and Japanese personnel who were assigned to these forward air facilities.[37]

Wracked by disease, starved for proper foods, living in wretched squalor, with AirSols night intruders banishing sleep, Japanese flyers at Kahili were literally wearied to the point where they were often victims of their own poor reactions in combat. The living conditions of mechanics and armorers were considerably worse than those of flight crews, and the numbed senses of maintenance personnel working through the night to patch damaged planes unwittingly caused the deaths of many flyers. Topping the bitter cup of enemy naval aviators was the knowledge that they had slight chance to live if their planes went down any distance from a Japanese base. A gross wastage of veteran pilots and crews occurred because the Japanese had no air-sea rescue apparatus comparable to the extensive Allied setup. The *2d Carrier Division*'s operations officer believed that "naval commanders were so afraid of the possible sacrifices which might be the consequences of attempting to rescue our crews which were shot down that often we abandoned on the open sea those men whom we could obviously have saved." [38] The fault was not entirely with commanders either, as the Japanese staff officer further noted that "our own combat men, the flying mates of

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[36] LCdr Mitsugu Kofukuda, IJN, quoted in Okumiya, Horikosi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 229.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 230. Commander Kofukuda's comments prompted a former commanding officer of MAG–24 to call attention to the equally high quality of the aircraft maintenance effort which complemented the know-how of airbase construction, and in particular "to the training, leadership, and ingenuity of the Marine ground crews who kept a high percentage of aircraft in operation, to the naval aviation supply system that got the goods to them, and to the designers and manufacturers who produced special handling equipment to reduce the manpower required and above all to speed accomplishment of the tasks." Col Lewis H. Delano ltr to CMC, dtd 27Nov62.

[38] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 312.

the same men who were shot down and adrift at sea, would not, even under orders, take any unnecessary chances to save their lives." [39]

If Japanese flyers "accepted their abandonment stoically," [40] there was no need for such resignation on the part of any Allied aircrewman who survived a crash or bailed out from a plunging wreck. In the vicinity of home fields, small amphibians were quick to the scene of any water landings, racing crash boats for the rescue honors. Hudsons and Venturas were stationed on the return routes of Allied air attack forces to spot downed planes and protect and keep in sight crew survivors. Flying boats, nicknamed Dumbos after a popular cartoon character, a flying elephant, made the pickup under the cover of a heavy fighter escort. Many men who swam or paddled ashore on the various islands owed their lives and freedom to friendly natives who cared for the injured and got the flyers back to the nearest coastwatcher, often after near-incredible adventures dodging enemy searching parties. In the Bougainville vicinity, where the Melanesians were less well disposed toward the colonial government, downed aviators were sometimes turned over to the Japanese, but the coastwatchers were usually able to call upon AirSols for a bombing and strafing mission against any village that actively supported the enemy. The harsh punishment, and the reason for it, were not lost on the offenders.

Bougainville and its offshore islands were by no means neglected during TOENAILS, even though most of the AirSols effort was in direct support of New Georgia operations. Dauntless dive bombers, helped along by 55-gallon belly tanks to increase their range, began joining Buin-Kahili strikes in early June, and they continued to hit such targets when their presence was not more urgently needed by ComAir New Georgia. Mitchells made their first appearance in Bomber Command's array in June, and the medium bombers too had a hand in the reduction of Bougainville installations when General Mulcahy did not put in a call for their support against enemy forces on New Georgia. Most of the missions flown against targets in the northern Solomons hampered Japanese efforts to support their beleaguered troops in the central Solomons.

One such strike, larger than most but still representative of many others, was mounted on 17 July, after aerial reconnaissance had disclosed that a large concentration of shipping lay off Buin. Led in by seven B–24s which bombed from high altitude, an attack force of 37 SBDs and 35 TBFs covered by 114 fighters dove on the enemy vessels with the Corsairs of the escort keeping close company. Zekes rising from Kahili's runways to intercept were shot down by the zooming F4Us almost before the enemy pilots knew what hit them. Surprise seemed to be complete, and AirSols flyers claimed 47 Zekes and five floatplanes, with 41 of the 52 credited to pilots of the four participating Marine fighter squadrons.[41] Excited Avenger and Dauntless crews were sure that they had sunk four destroyers and an oiler; postwar assessment gave

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Japanese Air Comments.* In this instance, as in others previously cited, the loss figure supplied by the Japanese War History Office—13 Zekes—appears to be too low in relation to the carefully checked contemporary credits to Allied flyers.

them the destroyer *Hatsuyuki* and damage to three others. The Japanese got slim pickings for their heavy losses: one SBD, one TBF, two P–38s, and one F4U.

In case the Japanese did not absorb the lesson that a 192-plane strike taught on the 17th, another equally heavy attack on the same area was made on the 18th, again with considerable damage to enemy shipping. Then, on the evening of the 19th, a Black Cat spotted and trailed an enemy task force near Choiseul, giving the lead to Strike Command which sent six Avengers up from Henderson Field, each carrying a 2,000-pound bomb. Dropping their loads from masthead height, the TBFs sank the destroyer *Yugure* and put a hole in the side of the heavy cruiser *Kumano*. A further attack during darkness by five more Avengers and eight Mitchells failed to score, but another destroyer, the *Kiyoami*, was sent to the bottom after daylight on the 20th by skip-bombing B–25s. Two days later, a shipping strike of 12 B–24s, 16 SBDs, and 18 TBFs covered by 122 fighters caught the seaplane tender *Nisshin* off Bougainville's south coast and sent it to the bottom with all the 24 medium tanks and most of the 600-odd troops it carried.

The ceaseless attacks on targets in the northern Solomons, while the fighting on New Georgia coursed its slow way to an end, left no doubt in Japanese minds of the general area of the next major Allied objective. When Munda airfield finally fell to the XIV Corps in early August, the enemy's only valid reason for continuing the fight in the central Solomons was to win time to strengthen Bougainville defenses.

In August and September, Seabees worked feverishly on the fields at Segi, Munda, the small island of Ondonga six miles northwest of Munda Point, and Barakoma on the east coast of Vella Lavella. As these Allied airbases came into heavy use, the forward fields of the Japanese became untenable. Munda had been rendered impotent by continued strikes mounted from Guadalcanal and Banika, and now Ballale and Kahili were emptied of planes by similar relentless attacks. Japanese auxiliary airstrips on Bougainville at Kara near Kahili, at Tenekau and Kieta on the northeast coast, and at Bonis on the Buka Passage were never finished or were knocked out of action almost as soon as they came into use.

In mid-October, headquarters of Strike Command, Fighter Command, and AirSols all moved to New Georgia, keeping pace with the shorter-ranged aircraft that were crowding into the expanding airdromes on the newly won islands. Bomber Command's Liberators continued to fly from Carney and Koli Point Fields on Guadalcanal, and its Mitchells were based in the Russells. The B–24s and PB4Ys made Buka their special target, and Japanese ships and barges drew a good share of the attention of the heavily gunned B–25s. To handle the enemy bases in southern Bougainville, Strike Command sent about a hundred planes a day in the last two weeks of October to bomb and strafe runways, defending antiaircraft, and whatever else seemed a profitable mark.

Since the SBD–TBF attack formations had abundant fighter cover, most opposition came from the enemy guns ringing the airfields. The tactics developed by Strike Command to deal with antiaircraft fire were calculated to give the Japanese gunners nightmares. As Lieutenant Colonel O'Neill's operations officer, Lieutenant Commander Harold H. Larsen, USN, out-

lined the procedure, the strike setup against Ballale, Kahili, and Kara was:

> . . . to have the dive bombers go down and hit the guns, with as many diving simultaneously as possible. Torpedo planes came down and hit the field with a lot of variations, due to the fact that the Japs soon caught on that the torpedo planes would hit the field and they would come out of their holes after the dive bombers went away and wallop the torpedo planes as they pulled out. So we had little sneakers arranged here and there—some dive bombers would lay up in the air until the SBDs had all gone over, and then come down and hit some of the Japs who got sassy; or they would wait until after the torpedo planes had finished their attacks and come down; or a group of four to six torpedo planes would come down in the center of the torpedo plane attack on the field and hit any guns that happened to open fire.[42]

The air offensive against the remaining Japanese positions in the Solomons, was so extensive in nature by the time of the Bougainville operation that local airbase commanders, or air operations officers as they were usually designated, acted as deputies for ComAirSols in tactical command of all aircraft assigned to their fields. Through local headquarters of the type commands, Fighter, Strike, and Bomber, directions were issued for various missions, with joint operations coordinated by the AirSols operations officer. On the eve of the Empress Augusta Bay landings, local tactical air control had been passed to Commander Air Guadalcanal, except for heavy bomber sorties which were handled by the Air Operations Officer, Koli Point, and to local commands at Banika, Segi, Ondonga, and Barakoma. Fighter and Strike Commands directly controlled all missions originated from Munda's fields.[43]

Perhaps the best way of showing how much the precursor Cactus Air Force of 1942 had grown in a year of steady reinforcement, aircraft improvement, and operational success is to outline AirSols strength at the start of the amphibious campaign in the northern Solomons:

Munda	
VF(N)-75	6 F4U-2*
12th Fighter Sqn	25 P-39
VC-24	24 SBD
VC-38	9 SBD
VC-40	9 SBD
VMSB-144	24 SBD
VMSB-234	10 SBD
VMSB-244	24 SBD
VC-38	9 TBF
VC-40	9 TBF
VMTB-143	10 TBF
VMTB-232	20 TBF
17th Photo Sqn	3 F5A*
Barakoma	
VMF-212	20 F4U
VMF-215	20 F4U
VMF-221	20 F4U
Ondonga	
70th Fighter Sqn	25 P-39
VF-17	36 F4U
No. 15 RNZAF Sqn	21 P-40
No. 17 RNZAF Sqn	21 P-40
Segi	
VF-33	24 F6F
VF-38	12 F6F
VF-40	12 F6F
Russells	
VMF-211	20 F4U
VMF(N)-531	5 PV-1
VB-138	12 PV-1
VB-140	15 PV-1
70th Bomb Sqn	16 B-25
75th Bomb Sqn	16 B-25
390th Bomb Sqn	16 B-25

[42] Larsen interview, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[43] ComAirSols OPlan No. T1-43, dtd 210ct43, in ComAirSoPac Correspondence; OpOs and Plans folder.

Guadalcanal

44th Fighter Sqn	25 P–38
Reserve (AAF)	10 P–40
Reserve (AAF)	10 P–39
VB–102	15 PB4Y
VB–104	12 PB4Y
5th & 307th Bomb Groups	48 B–24,4 SB–24*
No. 3 RNZAF Sqn	15 PV–1
VP–23	12 PBY5
VP–54	6 PBY5A
VP–71	15 PBY5
VD–1	7 PB4Y (Photo)
17th Photo Sqn	3 F5A*
VS–54	14 SBD3
VS–64	8 OS2U3*
VS–68	8 OS2U3*
SCAT	21 C–47/R4D [44]

[44] *Ibid.*, Annex A. Aircraft not previously identified in the text marked * are: F4U–2, the night fighter version of the Corsair; F5A, the photo-reconnaissance version of the P–38; OS2U3, the Chance-Vought Kingfisher, a single float scout plane; SB–24, a radar-equipped Liberator developed for night bombing. Listed under Guadalcanal are planes actually based at Florida Island which came under control of Commander Air Guadalcanal. Although this operation plan showed two P–38s as being attached to VMF(N)–531, the former commanding officer says that the squadron controlled only its own PV–1s. BGen Frank H. Schwable ltr to HistBr, G–3, HQMC, dtd 7Nov62.

The Japanese considered that the seizure of a foothold at Torokina and the construction of airfields there was the move that "decided the fate of Rabaul." [45] Once Marines were ashore on Bougainville, and Seabees and engineers were at work with bulldozer and grader, the neutralization of the airfields on Gazelle Peninsula was inevitable. Before the Japanese pulled out their air garrison, however, four months of heavy air attacks, begun by SWPA Allied Air Forces, intensified by South and Central Pacific carrier planes, and finished by AirSols, were necessary.

[45] *SE Area NavAirOps*—IV, p. 20.

Knockout by Torokina

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AND CARRIER AIR SUPPORT [1]

On 23 February 1942, a month after its fall to Japanese landing forces, Rabaul was bombed by six B–17s of the Fifth Air Force. This attack, mounted from Townsville, Australia, was the first of a series of raids by small groups of Allied heavy bombers on the enemy base. Between March and August, SWPA planes dropped an average of 130 tons of bombs a month on targets at Rabaul. On the 7th of August, 18 Flying Fortresses took off from Port Moresby, climbed over the 13,000-foot barrier of the Owen Stanley Mountains, and flew across the Solomon Sea to strike Vunakanau Field in support of the Marines landing at Guadalcanal. Frequently thereafter, American fortresses and Australian Catalinas bombed the airfields and crowded harbors at Rabaul in order to harass the Japanese and inflict as much damage as possible.

Only a relatively small number of Allied planes had enough range to participate in Rabaul raids, and those few were husbanded carefully by scheduling most strikes at night. Before any really sizeable daylight air attack could be launched, bases closer to the enemy stronghold had to be taken to serve as home fields and staging points for fighter escorts and light and medium bombers. Consequently, the interest of MacArthur's planners in acquiring airfields on the eastern slopes of the Owen Stanleys and on Woodlark and Kiriwina was fully as great as the eagerness of Halsey's staff to move into the New Georgias. Both area commanders wanted a clearer shot at Rabaul with longer times over target and more protection for bombers.

In part, the heavy losses of Japanese naval aircraft in the spring of 1943 during the Bismarck Sea battle, the *I Go*

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComAirPac Oct–Nov43 Analyses*; CTF 38 Rept of First Rabaul Strike—5Nov43, dtd 8Dec43; CTF 38 Rept of Second Strike on Shipping in the Rabaul Area—11Nov 43, dtd 8Dec43; CTG 50.3 AR of attack on enemy ships at Rabaul and subsequent enemy aircraft raid on TG 50.3, dtd 9Dec43 (all in COA, NHD); *SE Area NavOps—III; SE Area NavAirOps—IV*; Lt Roger Pineau, USNR, "Summary of Enemy Air Raids on Rabaul," 12Oct43–29Feb44, n.d., compiled for the Morison naval history project from Japanese documents; Maj Harris G. Warren, USAAF, "The Fifth Air Force in the Conquest of the Bismarck Archipelago, November 1943–March 1944," dtd Jan46 (AAF HistStudy No. 43, USAF Archives, Maxwell AFB), hereafter Warren, "FifthAF in the Bismarcks;" Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story;* George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports, A Personal History of the Pacific War* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), hereafter Kenney, *Reports*; Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*; George Odgers, *Air War Against Japan 1943–1945—Australia in the War of 1939–1945 (Air)* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957), hereafter Odgers, *RAAF Against Japan*; USSBS, *Campaign Against Rabaul.*

fiasco, and costly attacks on Guadalcanal in June opened the way for CARTWHEEL advances. During the summer, while AirSols planes beat off enemy aircraft attacking the New Georgia beachheads and raided the northern Solomons in their turn, General Kenney's Allied Air Forces concentrated on cutting down Japanese Army air strength on New Guinea. Rabaul, in a sense, had a breathing spell, but it was only a lull before a devastating storm broke.

The first telling blow of the air offensive that eventually neutralized Rabaul was struck on 12 October 1943. On that date, in the first of a series of raids planned in support of the pending Bougainville operation, Allied Air Forces mounted the largest strike of the war against Rabaul. General Kenney later stated that every SWPA plane "that was in commission, and that could fly that far, was on the raid"[2]—87 B–24s, 114 B–25s, 12 RAAF Beaufighters, 125 P–38s, and 11 weather and reconnaissance planes. Operational accidents and mechanical failures on the long haul from takeoff to target forced 50 of the fighters and bombers to turn back, but the successive attacking waves had strength to spare to overwhelm the 32 Zekes that rose to intercept.

The Mitchells came first, speeding low over the waters of St. George's Channel to avoid discovery by Japanese coastwatchers and radar. At the mouth of the Warangoi River, the nine squadrons of B–25s and their cover of P–38s roared inland just above the jungle to strafe enemy planes at Vunakanau and Rapopo and to leave a deadly litter of 20-pound parachute fragmentation (parafrag) bombs in their trace. This initial attack surprised the Japanese, and there was little effective opposition to the Americans. The RAAF Beaufighters coming in behind the Mitchells were not so lucky. Delayed in their takeoff from Dobodura by the cloud of dust raised by the B–25s, the Australian light bombers missed rendezvous with their escort over Kiriwina and had to fight their way through Zekes to complete their mission of strafing Tobera. After the Beaufighters completed their attack on the airfield, the Liberator squadrons, each plane carrying six 1,000-pound bombs, struck at shipping in Simpson Harbor. Happily claiming a staggering total of damage—one B–24 squadron reported 48 hits for 48 bombs dropped—the big bombers got back to Port Moresby after losing only two of their number. The total of Allied planes shot down during the day's action was five.

While the Japanese lost nothing like the "extremely optimistic"[3] figures for ship and plane losses estimated from the original claims of returning aircrews, the actual destruction wrought was significant. One 6,000-ton transport and several smaller ships were sunk, three destroyers and a bevy of small craft were damaged. Japanese records indicate that two of their interceptors were downed[4] and 45 planes destroyed or damaged on the ground. Allied aerial photographs indicated a much higher figure for enemy aircraft losses, although one smaller than the 177 of the first excited claims.

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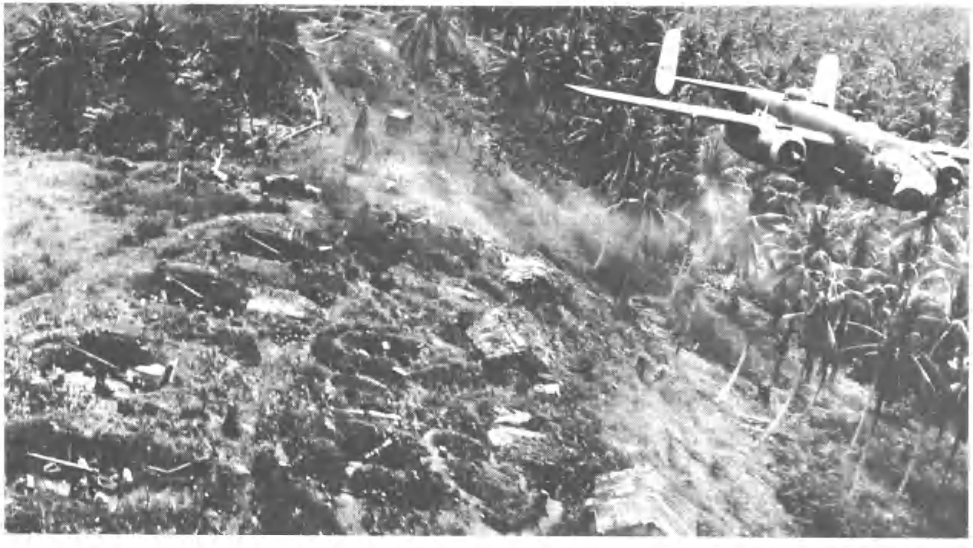
[2] Kenney, *Reports*, p. 313.

[3] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 321.

[4] Recent Japanese research indicates that four, rather than two fighters were lost, but disclaims the damage to the destroyers. *Japanese Air Comments.*



JAPANESE ANTIAIRCRAFT CREWS *abandon their 75mm guns at Rabaul during strafing runs by Army Air Forces B–25s. (USAF A–26636AC)*

PARAFRAG BOMBS *drop toward Japanese Bettys in revetments at Vunakanau field during a B–25 attack in October 1943. (USAF 25899AC)*

On 13 October, a heavy schedule of follow-up attacks was launched with an early dawn raid on shipping in Simpson Harbor by a squadron of RAAF Beaufort torpedo bombers. Visibility was poor during the Australians' attack, and the weather changed for the worse soon after, forcing 70 heavy bombers and 100 fighters already en route to turn back 150 miles from their objective. Continuing bad weather put off the next large strike until the 18th, and then only part of the attacking force got through, 54 B–25s that flashed in under a 200-foot ceiling of storm clouds to hit Tobera, Rapopo, and shipping in the harbor. Again Allied damage claims were unusually high and admitted Japanese losses questionably low. Kenney's flyers told of shooting down 10–12 planes and destroying 41 more on the ground and of sinking a small freighter and a corvette; Japanese records admit the loss of three interceptors and a 100-ton submarine chaser, while claiming nine B–25s against the actual loss of three.

The disparity of claim and counterclaim continues through the reports of 100-plane SWPA raids on 23, 24, and 25 October. More than 175 enemy aircraft were reported as destroyed or heavily damaged in these attacks, while only five Allied fighters and bombers were shot down. The Japanese admitted loss or damage to about two-fifths of the number of planes claimed, and, in their turn, decided that they had made 36 sure kills in the same three days of air battles. Regardless of Allied exaggerations, the actual Japanese losses were high, and the combat effectiveness of the *Eleventh Air Fleet* plummeted.

On 29 October, General Whitehead's 1st Air Task Force, which was the controlling headquarters for the SWPA attacks on Rabaul, sent 46 Liberators with an escort of 57 Lightnings against Vunakanau, where they reported destroying 9 planes on the ground and 16 in the air. Massive attacks planned for the next two days to support the Cape Torokina landings were grounded by unfavorable weather reports, and the dreary picture looked the same on 2 November. Two reconnaissance planes discovered, however, that the sky was clearing over the target, and that Rabaul's harbor was jammed with ships and its airfields held 237 planes of all types. The planned raid was quickly rescheduled.

Eighty B–25s with 80 P–38s were en route to the tempting target by 1100. Two squadrons of Lightnings led the way in a fighter sweep of the harbor, and were closely followed by four squadrons of Mitchells which strafed antiaircraft positions ringing Simpson's shore. This suppressive attack opened the path for the rest of the Mitchells, 41 in all, to hit shipping from a new approach route by swinging in over Crater Peninsula, North Daughter, and Rabaul town. Attacking through a frantic swarm of enemy fighters, the B–25s dropped to mast-top height to skip-bomb and strafe in the scramble of wildly dodging ships. Cruisers and destroyers fired their big guns into the water to send up towering columns of spray in the path of the attacking planes, while antiaircraft batteries fired without letup.

The damage claims that came out of this hotly-contested fight were high as usual, but the actual destruction was high, too. Two merchant ships and a mine sweeper were sunk, and a 10,000-ton oiler plus a number of smaller ships were hit. The Japanese admitted losing 20 planes, and the Allied Air Forces had eight B–25s and nine P–38s shot down. In General Kenney's opinion, the Japanese planes his

attack force encountered on 2 November "put up the toughest fight the Fifth Air Force encountered in the whole war." [5]

The increased savagery of the air battles over Rabaul was easily accounted for—reinforcements had arrived. Admiral Koga of the *Combined Fleet* had launched Operation *Ro* and sent 173 planes of the *1st Carrier Squadron, Third Fleet* to reinforce the 200-odd aircraft that Admiral Kusaka still had in his *Eleventh Air Fleet.* Koga's move was a desperate one, a gamble that immobilized his carriers at Truk while an all-out attempt was made to check the Allied advance into the northern Solomons. Operation *Ro*'s start was put off from mid-October to the end of the month when the *Combined Fleet* commander sortied from Truk with his main body, expecting to crush a U.S. invasion attempt in the Marshalls. A week's fruitless stay in Eniwetok's spacious lagoon convinced Koga that his intelligence was faulty, and after the enemy force returned to its base in the Carolines, the *1st Air Squadron* began staging into Rabaul's fields through Kavieng. As a result of the delay occasioned by the false alarm, the Japanese carrier aircraft reached the New Britain stronghold just as the Bougainville operation got underway.

Immediately caught in a swirl of air battles over Cape Torokina and Rabaul, many of the *Third Fleet's* Zekes, Kates, and Vals and the harried survivors of Kusaka's air groups fell victim to the guns of AirSols rampaging fighters, Kenney's raiding groups, and American carrier planes. On 5 November, for the first time in the war, U.S. carriers launched a strike against Rabaul.[6]

As soon as Admiral Koga learned of the American landing at Bougainville, he determined to reinforce the *Eighth Fleet* ships at Rabaul. Early on 4 November, AirSols Liberators on patrol over the Bismarck Sea sighted and attacked two enemy convoys, one a part of this reinforcement effort. Two oilers and two transports were damaged. About noon, a B–24 spotted 19 Japanese vessels, including 6 heavy cruisers, headed for the northern entrance to St. George's Channel. As soon as the patrol plane reported its find, Admiral Halsey determined to attack the enemy ships. He meant to stave off the probability of another night sea battle off Cape Torokina, one which Admiral Merrill's battered cruisers and destroyers, then refitting at Guadalcanal, could not possibly win. The threat posed by the Japanese heavy cruisers, Halsey considered, "was the most desperate emergency that confronted me in my entire term as COMSOPAC." [7]

Although ComSoPac expected that its "air groups would be cut to pieces," [8] he ordered the carrier task force (TF 38), which had supported the Bougainville landings, to attack the concentration of shipping at Rabaul. As he later dramatically stated his motive, "we could not let the men at Torokina be wiped out while

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[5] Kenney, *Reports*, p. 319. The most recent breakdown of Japanese losses indicate that 4 Zekes were shot down and that 11 other planes were destroyed or heavily damaged on the ground. *Japanese Air Comments.*

[6] A carrier task force built around the *Lexington* was scheduled to hit Rabaul on 21 February 1942, but it was discovered and attacked while it was still 250 miles east of New Britain. Although the Japanese planes were beaten off, it was decided that the invaluable carrier should not be risked once surprise was lost, and the raid was called off.

[7] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 181.

[8] *Ibid.*

we stood by and wrung our hands."[9] The carriers, *Saratoga* and *Princeton*, and their escorts were refueling near Rennell Island when the attack order was received on the evening of the 4th. Streaking north at 27 knots, the task force reached its launch position, a point 57 miles southwest of Cape Torokina, at 0900 the next morning. Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman, commanding TF 38, ordered into the attack virtually every plane—52 Hellcats, 23 Avengers, and 22 Dauntlesses—that his carriers could fly off. Combat air patrol over the task force was flown by AirSols Navy F6Fs operating from Barakoma.

Halsey's target priority was cruisers first, destroyers second, and Sherman's orders to his strike leader were "not to spread his attacks too thin over too many targets, but to concentrate sufficient forces to do serious damage to as many ships, particularly cruisers, as possible."[10] Two hours after take-off, the American planes flying over St. George's Channel sighted their objective, a cluster of 40–50 vessels in Simpson Harbor. The carrier bombers turned to the attack, roaring across Crater Peninsula, as the Hellcats stuck close overhead to ward off some 70 enemy fighters that had risen to intercept. As the dive bombers maneuvered to attack, the TBFs slipped down low to make their torpedo runs. The SBDs struck first in screaming dives that concentrated on the eight heavy cruisers in the violently dodging covey of warships and auxiliaries below them. As soon as the Dauntlesses had released their bombs, the Avengers cut in among the Japanese ships like wolves in a sheep herd—only these sheep could fight back. The antiaircraft fire was fierce and unceasing; one cruiser was so plagued by TBFs that it fired its main battery guns at them. Speeding through the tempest of flak and smoke, the carrier bombers rendezvoused and headed for home. The Hellcat escort, which had kept formation above the harbor during the attack, now closed the rear of the SBDs and TBFs and fought off the Zekes that tried to follow, refusing to be drawn off into individual dog fights.

Amazingly, the strike group returned with relatively small losses: five F6Fs, four TBFs, and one SBD were missing. Twenty Hellcats, nine Avengers, and eight Dauntlesses were damaged, about one out of five seriously. What was TF 38's score against the Japanese? The returning bomber crews figured they had made certain or very probable hits on six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and four destroyers. Twenty-five enemy planes were claimed as shot down in combat, and another 25 were listed as probable kills. While the Japanese admitted losing only an improbable four planes in postwar assessments, they confirmed the heavy damage to the warships. No ships were sunk, but four heavy cruisers were crippled, three of them severely, and two light cruisers and two destroyers were also hit. Most of the destruction was caused by the SBDs; only two American torpedoes found a mark. Whatever the exact toll of damage, the raid can only be considered an unqualified success, since it accomplished its purpose. As a result of his costly lesson in air superiority, Admiral Koga decided not to risk his heavy cruisers in an attack on the Torokina beachhead and ordered his ships back to Truk.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] CTF 38 Rept—5Nov43, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

At noon on 5 November, according to plan, a follow-up raid by SWPA Liberators reached Rabaul, found the airfields deserted, and bombed the town instead. The P–38 escort for the B–24s saw a number of enemy fighters, but the Japanese pilots steered clear of the American formations. Most of Admiral Kusaka's aircraft were out looking for Sherman's carriers, and, at 1255, the *Saratoga* and *Princeton* were sighted as they were recovering their last planes. By the time a flight of 18 torpedo-laden Kates arrived on the scene at dusk, the carriers were long gone. Attacked instead were an LCT, an LCI gunboat, and a PT boat proceeding from Torokina to the Treasurys. The little ships weathered a torpedo attack, even shot down one of the bombers, and limped back to Torokina still afloat. The returning enemy aircrews claimed that they had blown up and sunk a large carrier, set a medium carrier ablaze which later sank, and sunk two heavy cruisers and a light cruiser or destroyer!

By crediting the wild lies of the Kate crews, the Japanese fostered a comforting belief that they had come out far ahead in 5 November's air battles with the American naval planes. The self-delusion could not have lasted more than a week. A second carrier strike, stronger than the first, was in the offing, with destructive raids by SWPA planes spanning the interlude. Kenney's bombers, 26 B–24s with an escort of 60 P–38s, hit Rapopo on 7 November, dropping 167 1,000-pound bombs on its runways and dispersal areas. Five of the Lightnings were lost in running battles with Japanese interceptors, and returning AAF pilots claimed to have shot down 22 of the enemy Zekes. Between the 7th and the 11th, the frustrating barrier of storms that so often screened Gazelle Peninsula from Allied raiders caused General Whitehead's headquarters to cancel or divert to other targets several more large-scale daylight attacks mounted from New Guinea bases. RAAF Beauforts and American Liberators continued to get through at night, but not in any sizeable numbers. The Rapopo strike of 7 November proved to be the last daylight raid on Rabaul carried out by General Kenney's flyers.

On 11 November, Admiral Halsey scheduled a heavy carrier attack against shipping in Simpson Harbor. He asked that land-based bombers from the Southwest Pacific Area hit Rabaul's airfields and ordered ComAirSols to send a powerful strike group of Thirteenth Air Force B–24s to bomb enemy vessels as they tried to flee the attack of the Navy's dive and torpedo bombers. On this occasion, the planes of three more carriers, the *Essex*, *Independence*, and *Bunker Hill* of Rear Admiral Alfred E. Montgomery's TG 50.3, were available to reinforce Admiral Sherman's air groups. The attack plan called for the SWPA bombers to hit first, with the *Saratoga-Princeton* planes coming in next, followed by those from Montgomery's carriers. The AirSols Liberators were to arrive on the scene and make their bombing runs as the SBDs and TBFs flushed the Japanese ships from their anchorages.

Bad weather caused the attack plans to miscarry in part; only 13 of General Kenney's B–24s were able to break through the night's storm front and reach their target, Lakunai field. Admiral Sherman's task force arrived at its launch position southeast of the Green Islands at 0530 and began flying off its strike group immediately. Again TF 38 made a maximum effort, sending up 36 F6Fs, 23 SBDs,

and 15 TBFs, while AirSols Navy fighters flew combat air patrol over the carriers, landing on the flight decks for fuel and servicing as necessary. At Rabaul, dense cloud cover obscured most of the harbor, and the carrier planes sighted only a cruiser and four destroyers through the openings below them. These they attacked as the enemy ships, guns blazing, scurried for the protection of a rain squall. Several bomb and torpedo hits were claimed as certain or probable, but poor visibility prevented any sure assessment. Japanese air opposition was light, and the carrier planes returned to their ships after losing two planes in the attack, the same number that they claimed of the enemy.

A little over an hour after Admiral Sherman's carriers began launching, TG 50.3 flew off the first of its strike group from a position west of Bougainville. Each of Admiral Montgomery's carriers kept eight Hellcats on board to reinforce the AirSols combat air patrol, and about 165 planes in all were dispatched, 23 of them brand-new SB2Cs (Curtiss-Wright Helldivers), a heavier-armed and faster replacement for the SBD. Like the TF 38 raiders before them, the second group of carrier planes found cloud cover heavy over Simpson Harbor and shipping elusive. Japanese interceptors, alerted by the earlier attack, were aloft and waiting, and the American planes had to fight their way in to their targets and out again. Enemy antiaircraft fire or the guns of Zekes accounted for seven fighters, three dive bombers, and three torpedo bombers. In payment for these losses, the carrier aircrews claimed two destroyers sunk, several other warships damaged, and 35 Japanese planes downed. As the naval pilots headed for home, 42 AirSols B–24s attacked on schedule, but the results of high-level bombing through fleeting cloud gaps at dodging targets went unobserved.

Admiral Halsey had directed that, if possible, a second strike be mounted by both carrier forces, but Admiral Sherman was forced to withdraw his ships to the south as soon as his air group returned. The escorting destroyers were low on fuel, as zero wind conditions had forced the task force to operate at continuous full speed to launch and land planes of the striking force and the AirSols cover. The next morning, when TF 38 was well away from the threat of enemy air attack, the carriers fueled the destroyers for the run back to Espiritu Santo.

After his planes returned from their first strike on Rabaul, Admiral Montgomery was ready to launch a second attack. The Japanese, who followed the American planes back to their carriers, had different ideas. The enemy reconnaissance planes reported the task group's location, and, at noon, Admiral Kusaka sent out a strike group of 67 Zekes, 27 Vals, 14 Kates, and a small flight of Bettys. Marine Corsairs of VMF–212 and –221 had taken their turn on station over the task group earlier in the day, but when the Japanese approached, the combat air patrol was Corsairs and Hellcats from two shore-based Navy squadrons. Radar on the *Independence* detected the first enemy plane 115 miles away, and when the striking force was 80 miles out, the combat air patrol was vectored to intercept; at 40 miles the enemy was sighted and attacked. In the running fight that ensued, the American fighters were credited with shooting down 15 planes.

At 1355, as the Japanese launched their first dive bombing attack, they flew right

into the midst of 64 Hellcats and 23 Avengers which had been launched to take part in TG 50.3's second attack on Rabaul. In a wild, confused battle all over the sky, punctuated by heavy and accurate antiaircraft fire, the Americans so harassed the enemy that attacks on the carriers were uncoordinated and not pressed home with resolution. After the last Japanese plane drew off, AirSols fighters landed on the carriers for fuel and servicing before heading back to Barakoma. By the time the land-based planes had cleared the flight decks, it was too late to complete a second strike on Rabaul before dark. Admiral Montgomery cancelled the attack, recovered aircraft, and retired.

The cloud cover at Rabaul had helped keep down Japanese naval losses. One destroyer was sunk, a light cruiser and a destroyer were badly damaged, and three other warships were torn up by strafing bombers. If the ship losses were light, considering the weight of the American attacks, the enemy plane losses were not. Admiral Kusaka lost 17 Vals, 14 Kates, 8 Zekes, and several Bettys in the day's battles, nothing like the 111 planes the carrier aircrews claimed, but still a crippling toll.

On 12 November, as the American carriers were withdrawing, unharmed except in the imaginations of enemy pilots, Admiral Koga ordered the *Third Fleet* planes at Rabaul back to Truk. Although the Emperor issued an Imperial Rescript praising the results of the *Ro* Operation—the bogus damage claims were truly impressive—Japanese plane losses "had put the carrier air force in a position where further combat would rob it of even a skeleton force around which to rebuild." [11]

[11] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 25.

In less than two weeks of furious action, the *1st Air Squadron* had lost 43 of its 82 Zekes, 38 of 45 Vals, 34 of 40 Kates, and all 6 of its reconnaissance planes. In feeble replacement for the carrier aircraft, Admiral Koga diverted 26 Vals from the Marshalls air garrison to Rabaul.

With his carrier plane reinforcements gone, and his own *Eleventh Air Fleet's* strength down to less than 200 planes of all types and states of repair, Admiral Kusaka could do little to interfere with Bougainville operations. Except for small-scale night harassing attacks on the beachhead, enemy air attacks virtually ceased after mid-November. At the same time, Allied air strikes on Rabaul also fell off drastically in size and number. Australian Beauforts were the only aircraft to attack the enemy fortress for a month, as AirSols planes concentrated on patrol and close support missions at Cape Torokina, and the Allied Air Forces hit targets on New Guinea and western New Britain. During the comparative lull, both sides were preparing for the final phase of the battle for control of the air over Rabaul, the AirSols assault mounted from fields on Bougainville.

FIGHTER SWEEPS AND ESCORTS [12]

With the Bougainville beachhead well established and a new phase of the CARTWHEEL campaign pending, AirSols again had a change in commanders. In

[12] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComAirPac Dec43 Analysis; SoPac ACI Repts;* IntelSect, SoPacFor, The Air Assault on Rabaul 17Dec43–19Feb44, n.d., hereafter *Air Assault on Rabaul;* CTG 37.2 ARs of First, Second, and Third Kavieng Strikes, 25Dec43–4Jan44, dtd 1Feb44 (COA, NHD);

keeping with Admiral Halsey's policy of rotating the top job among the participating services, General Twining's relief was a Marine. On 20 November 1943, General Mitchell took over as ComAirSols, retaining his positions as Commanding General, MASP and 1st MAW. With Mitchell's advent, there was no change in the heads of major tactical commands and little in the staff of AirSols. Colonel O'Neill and General Matheny, both recently promoted, continued to lead the Strike and Bomber Commands, respectively, while Marine Colonel William O. Brice, who had taken over on 24 October, ran Fighter Command. Brigadier General Field Harris, as ComAirNorSols, was slated to direct air operations originating from Bougainville once its fields were open for use.

The principal employment of AirSols squadrons in late November and early December was the support of operations in the northern Solomons. Only a small portion of the missions flown were in direct support of the troops at Cape Torokina; the majority of strikes were sent against Japanese bases elsewhere on Bougainville or on neighboring islands. Sea traffic between Rabaul and the enemy garrisons in the Solomons thinned to an insignificant trickle, as virtually every plane and pilot in AirSols had a hand in a successful and continual barge hunt.

Not only were the waters around Bougainville unsafe for the Japanese, but the air over the sea was equally unhealthy. Bettys on reconnaissance south of New Britain were shot down with such regularity that their patrols had to be curtailed drastically and halted altogether eventually. The vulnerable bombers had once carried two or three pilots in a crew of eight men, now only one pilot was risked in a cut-down crew of five or six men. Although Admiral Kusaka asked for additional medium bombers for patrol missions, he was turned down; none were available for the Southeast Area.[13]

With his search sector south of Rabaul closed to all except night-flying scouts and an occasional lucky daylight reconnaissance pilot who escaped the eager AirSols hunters, the Japanese air commander had to rely on radar and coastwatchers for warning of Allied raids. The *Eleventh Air Fleet* had 11 radar sets in the Rabaul-Kavieng area with a maximum interception range of 90 miles, and a like number of smaller sets stripped from aircraft which could pick up planes at 72 miles. All these stations were in operation during the height of the air battles over Rabaul.

Gazelle Peninsula was guarded from every approach. If an AirSols strike group took a course that brought it near northern Bougainville, radar on Buka could pick up the planes and give Rabaul 50–60 minutes warning. If the raiders swung west over the Solomon Sea to come in from the south, radar on the peninsula's east coast spotted them and provided a half an hour's notice of impending attack. Similarly, enemy interceptors had a 30-

ComAirNorSols FtrComd MissionRepts, 17Dec43–26Jan44, hereafter *FtrComd Missions;* IntelSect, MASP, FMF, The Combat Strategy and Tactics of Maj Gregory Boyington, USMCR, dtd 19Jan44, reprinted by AirIntelGru, DivNavIntel, CNO, as OpNav–16–V #842, dtd 15Feb44; AirIntelGru, DivNavIntel, CNO, Interview of Lt Joseph E. Butler, USNR (Op Nav–16–V #E47), dtd 22May44 (COA, NHD), hereafter *Butler Interview; SE Area NavOps—III; SE Area NavAirOps—V;* Sherrod, *MarAirHist;* Ross, *RNZAF;* USSBS, *Campaign Against Rabaul.*

[13] *SE Area NavAirOps—IV*, p. 42.

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minute alert if Allied planes appeared on the screens of any of the five sets at Cape St. George. When the attackers skirted wide around New Ireland's southern tip and then roared west across the narrow island for Rabaul, radar near Borpop airfield gave 20 minutes alarm. The coverage to the north and west of Rabaul was equally effective and thorough, and the chances for surprise were slim.

The radar sets available to SoPac forces were superior to those used by the Japanese, and the disparity carried over to techniques of radar employment. Not only were enemy planes picked up farther away from their targets, they were also frequently set up for a kill by ground control intercept (GCI) radar working with night fighters. In contrast to the enemy, who by choice or force of circumstance included their aircraft sets in Rabaul's early warning system, AirSols made extensive use of airborne radar for night bombing and interception.

Defending the Bougainville beachhead, the Venturas of VMF(N)-531 and Corsairs of VF(N)-75 proved themselves efficient night fighters. It took a little while before American ground commanders were willing to silence antiaircraft guns in favor of interceptors closing on enemy raiders, but when Kates and Bettys began to flame out of the sky with regularity, the night fighters won enthusiastic acceptance. Unaccountably, Japanese hecklers flew low enough for the Marine Venturas to intercept effectively, and the record of the two night fighter squadrons was about the same despite the Corsair's superior flight performance. The number of planes shot down by means of radar interception was not large—6 were claimed by VF(N)-75 during 4 months in the combat area and 12 by VMF(N)-531 during 10 months—but the effect was all that could be desired. The Japanese quickly grew chary of risking their planes in areas protected by the GCI-night fighter teams.

During the period when the Navy and Marine night fighters were winning their spurs over Cape Torokina, tension was mounting throughout AirSols command as the plans for the pending assault on Rabaul took shape. The progress of the Seabees working on the airfields within the IMAC perimeter was avidly followed not only at Allied headquarters but in the squadrons themselves. AirSols veterans were already familiar with the tactics that General Mitchell would employ to knock out the enemy base; they had worked effectively in neutralizing Bougainville's airfields and would do so again. The pressure would be constant, destructive, and varied in nature.

The fighter plane was the key to the successful prosecution of the AirSols offensive. As escorts, the fighters made large-scale bombing raids feasible, particularly by SBDs and TBFs, which were much more vulnerable to enemy attack than the heavily-armed B-24s and B-25s. Operating independently of bombers, fighter formations could range at will over Japanese airfields, challenging enemy interceptors to fight. This tactic, the fighter sweep, was honed to a fine edge at Kahili, where the marauding squadrons based at Munda, Ondonga, Segi, and Barakoma made steady inroads on enemy strength during missions calculated to clear the sky of Japanese Zekes and Hamps.

For the individual Allied pilot, the risk entailed in taking part in a mission intended to force air combat was considerable. For the Japanese pilot who met the attack, the risk was much greater and

the chance of survival poorer. Even the latest model Zekes were no match for the Corsairs and Hellcats which now predominated among the AirSols fighters, while the Warhawks (Kittyhawks) and Airacobras, and the Lightnings particularly, could hold their own in combat, and, at the proper altitudes, could outperform the Japanese planes. The enemy naval pilots were engaged in a losing battle, and most of them knew it, but they fought on despite a strong sense of impending doom.[14]

Apprehensively, the Japanese awaited the completion of the first Allied airfield on Bougainville, knowing it marked the beginning of the SoPac attack on Rabaul. On 9 December, ground crews of VMF–212 and –215 landed in the IMAC beachhead and moved to the Torokina fighter field, where the 71st Naval Construction Battalion was putting the rough finish on its work. The next day, 17 Corsairs of VMF–216 christened the runway for operational use; they were followed in by six SBDs and four SCAT transports with additional personnel and equipment. In a week's time, after extensive preparations were made to fuel and service the hundreds of planes that would stage through Torokina, General Mitchell was ready to launch the first fighter sweep against Rabaul. As sweep leader, ComAirSols choose Major Gregory Boyington, commanding officer of VMF–214, a veteran fighter pilot with 20 enemy planes to his credit, six of them shot down over China during his service as a member of the American Volunteer Group.

At first light on 17 December, a powerful fighter force took off from New Georgia airfields for Bougainville. After a fueling stop at Torokina, where the pilots received a final briefing on the mission, Boyington in the lead plane of the sweep was again airborne at 0830. In the next 40 minutes, 30 more Marine Corsairs, 23 RNZAF Kittyhawks, and 23 Navy Hellcats joined up over the beachhead and fitted themselves into a ladder-like attack formation.[15] When the Allied fighters arrived over their objective at 1005, only one lonely Rufe floatplane was sighted in the air, but the P–40s flying low in the lead spotted about 40 enemy planes taking off from Lakunai and swept down to intercept. Two Zekes were shot down as they were climbing from the runway, and three more enemy planes were claimed by the New Zealanders in the resulting battle. Other Japanese fighters, 70 in all, took off during the 40 minutes that the Allied planes circled over the harbor, town, and airfields, but few enemy pilots showed any inclination to climb up to the 25,000–30,000-foot heights where the Corsairs and Hellcats awaited them. Boyington, using a radio channel that he knew the Japanese monitored, taunted the enemy to come up and fight but only got an unrewarding response, "Come on down, sucker," for his efforts.[16]

In addition to the RNZAF bag of five Zekes, a Navy pilot of VF–33 claimed one of the enemy fighters, and a Marine of Boyington's squadron flamed the unlucky Rufe which had greeted the sweep's arrival. Seven planes, however, were slim pickings, especially when three Kittyhawks were downed, and only one RNZAF pilot was recovered. The Japanese, preoccupied with their air attacks on the

[14] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 302*ff*.

[15] Actually, 81 planes took off for the sweep but 5 turned back for mechanical reasons.

[16] *FtrComd Missions*, 17Dec43.

Arawe landing force, were little disposed to tangle with such a formidable fighter force so long as the Allied planes did not attack ground targets. On the whole, the results of the first fighter sweep were disappointing.

A curious aspect of the mission on the 17th was that 27 Tonys, a Japanese Army fighter with a distinctive appearance not at all like that of the Zeke family, were sighted. In the following weeks of attacks, hundreds of reports of Tonys were made by AirSols pilots and aircrews who claimed to have engaged and shot down many of the planes. Japanese records, however, agree that the only Army planes at Rabaul in this period were reconnaissance types, and these were present in small numbers. Apparently the reports were the result of a consistent mistake in identification, though what Zeke model got credit for being a Tony is hard to visualize. Whatever their type, the enemy interceptors soon got over the shyness they displayed on the 17th.

General Mitchell's attack plan called for a continuous round of strikes against Rabaul following the opening fighter sweep, but bad weather turned back the raid planned for 18 December. Secondary targets were hit instead, or, as AirSols intelligence officers phrased it: "Rabaul's Japs were blessed and Bougainville's damned when weather prevented rendezvous of the large Liberator strike with fighter escort and alternative targets on Bougainville were taken." [17] On the 19th, 16 B–24s broke through the weather front and attacked shipping in Simpson Harbor and Rabaul town as clouds obscured the primary targets, the airfields. Evidently, the presence of the big bombers was what was needed to overcome Japanese reluctance to close with Allied fighters. The 50-plane escort was hotly engaged during withdrawal and made a modest claim of having shot down four Zekes; the enemy admitted the loss of five planes, making it almost a unique occasion in the history of such claims. Japanese pilots in their turn got a more usual score, two Corsairs instead of the eight fighters they asked credit for.

AirSols second fighter sweep over Rabaul on 23 December got markedly better results than the first. In response to Major Boyington's conviction that he had had too many planes to control effectively on the 17th, the sweep force was held to 48 fighters. Taking advantage of the Japanese eagerness to intercept and break up bombing raids, Boyington's fighters were scheduled to hit soon after 18 B–24s with a 46-plane escort attacked Rabaul's airfields. When the sweep group arrived on the scene, 25 minutes after the bombing attack began, about 40 Zekes were chasing the retiring bomber formation. Over Cape St. George, the Allied fighters tore into the enemy interceptors and had a field day, claiming 30 Zekes for a loss of three F4Us. Since the F6Fs of the bomber escort were credited with shooting down three planes while losing one of their number, and the bomber crews added their own claim for 6 enemy fighters, the day's total score was 39. In their postwar reconstruction of this air battle, the Japanese recalled losing 6 fighters and accounting for 5 B–24s and 19 fighters.

The discrepancy in figures was duplicated on 24 December when an AirSols attack in the pattern of the previous day was mounted. This time the Liberators concentrated on Vunakanau and the

[17] ComAirSols IntelSummary, 18–19Dec43.

escorts, 16 P–38s and 32 F4Us, shot down 6 Zekes; the trailing fighter sweep, composed of 24 P–40s and 22 F6Fs, accounted for 14 enemy fighters, while losing 7 of their own number over the target. Two RNZAF Venturas on rescue and patrol duty over St. George's Channel during the strike added at least 2 Zekes to raise the day's claims to 22. The Japanese version of the action saw 58 Allied planes go down as only 6 Zekes were lost.

After the combined attack on Christmas Eve, General Mitchell switched back to a week of separately mounted bombing strikes and fighter sweeps. Liberators with heavy escorts struck the airfields on the 25th and 30th, and 49- and 45-plane sweeps were over Rabaul on the 27th and 28th. These forays cost AirSols nine planes, and, in addition, a B–25 that was shot down by antiaircraft fire while it was attacking the radar station near the lighthouse at the tip of Cape St. George. A Dumbo landed and rescued the Mitchell crew from close inshore despite fire from machine guns and artillery. Allied pilots and aircrews claimed to have shot down 74 enemy planes over Rabaul between Christmas and New Year's Day.[18]

The machine guns of enemy fighters were only one means, although the principal one, by which Rabaul was defended. Several times during the late December strikes against the Japanese base, AirSols pilots reported that enemy planes were trying to break up attacking formations and destroy aircraft by air-to-air bombing. Most of these bombs were incendiaries, generally of 70-pound size with a bursting charge of picric acid and an explosive load of about 200 phosphorus-filled steel pellets.[19] Zekes, flying above and head on to Allied aircraft, released these bombs so that they would explode in the path of the targeted planes. The incidence of such attacks increased sharply in the new year, and a number of planes were damaged by the spectacular phosphorus fireballs, although actual losses charged to such air-to-air bombing were slight.

Far more dangerous to the attackers were the Japanese antiaircraft guns ringing any worthwile target at Rabaul. At least 260 guns, ranging in size from 13mm machine guns to 12.7cm cannon, were manned by enemy Army and Navy crews throughout the whole of the AirSols attack. Fortunately for the Allied flyers, the only fire control radar the Japanese had was the first such piece manufactured in Japan; it had many mechanical defects and was ineffective. Enemy range and height finders were not too accurate either, and Zekes flying alongside bomber formations were used to radio altitude and speed data to the guns. Communications difficulties marred the usefulness of this makeshift system.[20]

AirSols had available a limited number of Liberators. While these bombers could release their loads from heights above the reach of the heaviest Japanese antiaircraft guns, the destructive effect of such high altitude bombing did not approach the saturation level that the AirSols offensive required. As soon as the Piva bomber field at Torokina was operational, a new stage in the attack on Rabaul would

[18] ComAirSols IntelSummary, 25–31Dec43.

[19] MilAnalysisDiv, USSBS(Pac), *Japanese Air Weapons and Tactics* (Washington: GPO, Jan47), p. 47.

[20] USSBS, *Interrogation* No. 224, Cdr Yasumi Doi, IJN, I, p. 209.

begin, and Strike Command would commit its SBDs and TBFs. When the field on Stirling Island was ready for use, Bomber Command would add B–25s to the assault. The enemy would be hit by bombers and fighters from high, low, and medium altitudes, from every direction possible, and around the clock.

Until General Mitchell was able to unleash the full offensive power of his command, Admiral Sherman's carriers were called upon to heighten the effect of the blows that AirSols could deliver. Intelligence that the Japanese had heavy troop reinforcements en route to the Bismarcks and a strong reserve of aircraft nesting at Kavieng prompted ComSoPac to order an attack on the New Ireland base set for Christmas morning. Since SWPA forces were poised to launch the Cape Gloucester operation at this time, the carrier strike might well disrupt the Japanese aerial counterattack that was sure to be mounted when word of the landings reached Admiral Kusaka.

Before dawn on the 25th, Sherman's carrier task group, composed of the *Bunker Hill*, *Monterey*, and six destroyers, started launching aircraft from a position 150 miles northeast of Kavieng. At first light, the planes—31 F6Fs, 28 TBFs, and 27 SB2Cs—joined up and headed for the enemy base, their primary target being shipping in the harbor. Air opposition was negligible; most of Kavieng's fighters had moved to Rabaul on the 24th, decoyed there by an American cruiser-destroyer bombardment of the Buka-Bonis area (heretofore a usual prelude to a SoPac amphibious landing). With the defending Zekes gone, escort Hellcats were able to stick to the attack plan and precede the light bombers in a strafing run to suppress ships' antiaircraft fire during the bombing. Only a few ships were present, and skip-bombing TBF's sunk one of these, a 5,000-ton freighter. Another medium-sized freighter was damaged, and a 500-ton mine sweeper was driven on the rocks.[21]

The strike group was back on board its carriers by 1045, with only one TBF missing. The combat air patrol shot down three enemy bombers during retirement, and ships' antiaircraft got two more, when Bettys tried a torpedo attack. Instead of heading back for port, the carriers stayed at sea on ComSoPac's orders, waiting for a chance to catch the Japanese reinforcement convoys.

On 1 January, a second strike was launched against Kavieng when search planes reported enemy warships near the harbor. This time, about 30 Zekes were present to add their power to the intense antiaircraft fire of 2 light cruisers and 2 destroyers. The Japanese fighters dropped phosphorus bombs on the SB2Cs as they dove to the attack, but without effect. Although the American aircrews were certain that they had hit their targets repeatedly, the actual damage to the skillfully handled ships was slight. The Zekes and ships' guns combined to down two Hellcats and a Helldiver: the carrier aircrews' claim was 14 planes, twice the admitted Japanese losses.

A third attack was launched on 4 January in an attempt to sink a cruiser force reported as being just north of Kavieng. The strike group found the cruisers actually were large destroyers and attacked the radically maneuvering ships with little luck. Reefs prevented effective torpedo

[21] *Japanese Air Comments.*

runs, and the torpedoes that were dropped were set to run too low to hit destroyers; the only damage was caused by strafing.[22] One F6F was shot down by the Zekes that harried the attack formation like wolves; three enemy fighters were downed. The combat air patrol accounted for one Betty scouting the carriers and wiped out a ferry group, a bomber and six Zekes, heading for Kavieng. According to ComSoPac's orders, no further strikes were sent against the enemy ships on the 4th; destroyers were not considered worth the risks of a second attack.

Admiral Sherman's task group retired after the third strike on Kavieng unmolested by the *Eleventh Air Fleet*. After their withdrawal, the carriers and destroyers refueled and headed for the Central Pacific to take part in the Marshalls operation. Although the Rabaul-centered cordon of enemy bases had experienced its last carrier air raid, the cessation attracted little notice among garrison members. Instead of an occasional unpleasant taste of ship-based dive and torpedo bombers, the Japanese were now to be force-fed a steady diet of SBD–TBF attacks mounted from Bougainville.

PIVA PUNCH [23]

By the year's end, the Seabees had the northernmost of the two Piva airstrips they were working on, Piva Uncle, ready for use as a staging base for light bombers. Full-scale operations from the field, however, required an additional week of logistic preparations, so that repeated 50–100 plane missions could be mounted. While fuel and supply dumps and servicing facilities were expanded to handle the planned strikes, the pace of attack against Rabaul never slackened. If anything, it increased.

In order that the Japanese garrison would get no respite from the daily round of Liberator raids and fighter sweeps during the first week in January, three squadrons of RAAF Beauforts bombed the enemy airfields at night. Instead of hitting their targets in mass formations, the Kiriwina-based Australians made single plane attacks in succession, a harassing tactic used to good advantage by both sides throughout the fighting in the South Pacific. The last of these Beaufort missions was flown against Lakunai and Tobera on the night of 7–8 January; thereafter, the task of hitting Rabaul targets at night was handled by SoPac aircraft. The area of operations of the RAAF planes on Kiriwina was restricted to central New Britain east of Arawe and west of Wide Bay, an Allied Air Forces decision that disappointed the Australians who preferred a more decisive role in the fighting.

Emphasizing the fact that the air battles were not all one-sided in favor of the attackers was the loss of Major Boyington on 3 January during a fighter sweep over Rabaul. Before the sweep leader disappeared, he was seen to shoot down his 26th enemy plane, a feat that ranked him with Major Joseph J. Foss as the lead-

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[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComAirPac Jan–Feb44 Analyses*; ComAirSoPac Daily IntelBuls, Jan–Feb44; *SoPac ACI Repts; Air Assault on Rabaul; StrikeComd WarDs; FtrComd Missions; Butler Interview; SE Area NavOps—III; SE Area NavAirOps—V*; Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*; Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier*; Odgers, *RAAF Against Japan*; Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*; Ross, *RNZAF;* Sherrod, *MarAirHist.*

ing Marine Corps ace of the war.[24] Boyington parachuted from his crippled Corsair into St. George's Channel and was picked up by an enemy submarine and taken to Rabaul; eventually, he reached Japan and spent the rest of the war in a prison camp.

The day on which Major Boyington was downed was one of the few in early January when the weather observations of the attacking squadrons could read: "Visibility unlimited, clear over target, ceiling 30,000 feet." [25] Much more frequently, Rabaul was partially or wholly protected by rain squalls and heavy cloud cover and returning flyers reported: "Heavy solid front on New Ireland coast extending south from St. George Cape," or "Heavy overcast to 8,000 feet, built up in thick layers." [26] The weather was so changeable and often varied so much over the course of a day that even reports of clear skies by reconnaissance planes might no longer hold true two or three hours later when a strike group reached its objective.

On 5 January, an unbroken wall of clouds over St. George's Channel prevented the first land-based SBD–TBF strike on Rabaul from even reaching its target. The 26 Dauntlesses and 21 Avengers that took part returned to their home fields on New Georgia, but not before the dive bombers attacked enemy troop concentrations on Bougainville. On the 7th, a similar light bomber group staged through Piva Uncle, picked up its fighter escort over Bougainville, and headed for Tobera field. Again the weather was poor and the primary target was closed in. Rapopo field was visible, but the strike was briefed for another secondary target, the radar installation near the Cape St. George lighthouse, which was attacked instead. Over Rabaul, antiaircraft fire was heavy and interceptors were numerous and aggressive, but the 72-plane escort was a match for the Zekes. Twelve enemy planes were claimed against a loss of three F6Fs, two in a mid-air collision, and two SBDs which crashed on the way back to base.

Finally, on 9 January, the Navy and Marine bombers were able to get their first good shot at Rabaul targets. Twenty-three SBDs and 16 TBFs flew up from Munda, fueled at Piva Uncle, and winged toward Tobera, home field for most of the Japanese fighters. The enemy had ample warning of the raid, and about 40 interceptors were airborne when the AirSols planes arrived on the scene. The Zekes did not close until the bombers nosed over to make their dives, and then the escort, 62 fighters, beat off the Japanese handily. The SBDs struck first, concentrating their half-ton bombs on defending gun positions; the TBFs followed, hitting the runway and apron with 2,000 pounders. Antiaircraft fire was light over the field but heavy on the retirement course which followed the Warangoi River to its mouth. Thirteen Japanese planes were claimed by the escort which lost a Hellcat and two Kittyhawks; the strike group had six aircraft damaged that made it back to Piva Uncle. One badly shot-up Marine Avenger, its gunner dead at his post, had to ditch off Torokina; the pilot was rescued uninjured.

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[24] Actually, before Boyington went down himself, he finished off two more planes, making his an unequalled score among Marine pilots in World War II. His total of 28 victories includes the six planes he shot down as a member of the American Volunteer Group.

[25] *FtrComd Mission Repts*, 3Jan44.

[26] *Ibid.*, 5Jan44 and 6Jan44.

MECHANICS OF VMF–211 *repair a Corsair which returned from a strike with its wings and fuselage full of holes from antiaircraft shell fragments.* (*USMC 77816*)

Once the light bombers had scored, they came back again and again to hit Rabaul with increasing strength and effect. The Japanese reported that they met each attack in early January with all their remaining fighters, but that they could not check the raids in spite of what they termed "the remarkable results obtained each time" [27] by their interceptors. In general, the enemy fighter pilots hit the Allied formations as they were heading in for Rabaul, attempted to penetrate the screen of escorts and get at the bombers, and often followed the SBDs and TBFs into their dives, through the defending antiaircraft fire, and all the way out to the rendezvous area before sheering away. The job of fending off the Japanese planes that broke through the high, medium, and low cover fell to the RNZAF Kittyhawks. Flying close cover for the American bombers, the New Zealanders shared the bombing runs, braved the storm of short-range flak, and guarded the tails of the SBDs and TBFs as they streaked for home.

Despite the diversity of plane types and pilots flying in AirSols attack formations, air discipline was tight; the cardinal rule observed by fighters and bombers alike was to stay joined up and fight together. By the time of the Rabaul battle, the Japanese were following the same course and fought in two- and three-plane sections that stuck together fairly well. Occasionally, since aircraft on both sides used voice radio in the medium high frequency range, there was an exchange of insults calculated to goad the incautious pilot into reckless action. The Strike Command operations officer noted that "we would call them and tell them, 'We're coming, you little so-and-sos, you'd better get ready,' and they would tell us what they were going to do to us when we got there." [28] This ruse had little effect; Japanese actions showed that they were husbanding their dwindling strength, employing their fighters to best advantage in the face of mounting odds.

During the first few weeks of determined assault on Rabaul's airdromes and the planes they harbored, AirSols fighters and bombers made few attacks on the shipping in Simpson Harbor. Allied intelligence officers kept close tab on the number and type of ships present, however, through the reports of returning pilots and aircrewmen and the findings of frequent reconnaissance missions. General Mitchell had no intention of letting the enemy continue to reinforce and resupply Rabaul with impunity. He intended, in fact, to use his planes to choke off all significant contact by sea between the Japanese stronghold and its sources of supply, just as AirSols had already shredded the lifeline between Rabaul and its satellite bases in the Solomons.

Just before dawn on 14 January, after a steady procession of Liberators and Mitchells had made the night hellish for Rabaul's garrison, six TBFs attempted a raid on the shipping in Simpson Harbor. Foul weather forced these Avengers to turn back, but later in the day the enemy ships were attacked by 16 more in company with 37 SBDs. The primary target of the bombers, Lakunai airfield, was closed in, and the strike group was alerted as it flew east across New Ireland to hit its secondary target, the shipping. About 30 enemy fighters intercepted the Allied

[27] *SE Area NavAirOps—V*, p. 18.

[28] *Butler Interview*, p. 2.

formation while it was still 40–50 miles from its mark; over Blanche Bay the number of defending Zekes doubled.

The escort of American and New Zealand fighters beat off most of the enemy attackers, giving the SBDs a clear shot at a harbor full of scurrying ships. Nosing over into steep dives at about 8,000 feet, the Dauntless pilots aimed their planes at the biggest ships, trying to drop their half-ton bombs right down the stacks. The TBFs followed the dive bombers in swift, shallow approaches that brought them down to masthead height where they tried to slam 2,000-pound bombs against the sides of their elusive targets.

Nine direct hits on seven cargo vessels plus hits on two destroyers were claimed, as well as 20 damaging near misses. All but two of the direct hits were credited to the torpedo bombers. During the running battle with enemy interceptors, the escort and the bombers reported they shot down 29 planes and probably got 16 more; the corresponding AirSols loss was 8 fighters, with 4 pilots recovered, 2 SBDs, and a TBF. The admitted Japanese loss was 3 planes, plus bomb damage to a destroyer and an oiler; their claimed bag of Allied aircraft was 65.

Strike Command's attacks on shipping continued, the results improved, and, by the end of January, seven merchantmen and an oiler had been sunk and three more ships badly damaged. The TBFs, which proved to be more effective in shipping attacks than the SBDs, used 4- to 5-second delay fuses on 1-ton bombs, came in very fast 30–40 feet off the water, headed directly for the targeted ships, dropped their bombs when close aboard, and streaked directly over the ships for the rendezvous point. The pilots said it was pretty hard to miss, but no one was anxious to stick around to check results. The Strike Command operations officer said that he tried:

> . . . to get the pilots to slow down and join up as soon as possible but coming in like that, being shot at continuously, and with phosphorous bombs dropped on them consistently by the enemy fighter planes, they just couldn't do it. I did persuade one squadron commander, one day, to slow down and try to wait for the other men, and he said he eased back on the throttle just a little and he was the last man out.[29]

As the tempo of AirSols attacks in the new year increased, and their strength and effectiveness grew apace, Allied pilots noted a definite falling off in the number of Japanese planes rising to intercept. For a time in early January, it appeared that "there was a question as to whether reinforcements for the Bismarcks sinkhole would be forthcoming." [30] Admiral Koga and his staff, however, were convinced by the intensity of the AirSols attack that the next major Allied move would be made in the Southwest rather than the Central Pacific. Consequently, the *Combined Fleet* commander decided to commit the *2d Air Squadron* to Rabaul, denuding the carriers *Runyo*, *Hiyo*, and *Ryuho* of their air groups to add 69 fighters, 36 dive bombers, and 23 torpedo bombers to the *Eleventh Air Fleet*. When the carrier planes arrived, surviving flying personnel of the battered *26th Air Flotilla*, which had fought at Rabaul since the Guadalcanal landings, were withdrawn to Truk to refit and reorganize.

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[29] *Butler Interview*, p. 2.

[30] *Air Assault on Rabaul*, p. 7.

Many of the air flotilla's veteran pilots and crewmen, despite the knowledge that they would be free of the hopeless fight at Rabaul, were unhappy to be going. The men felt there was an implication of failure in their relief, and that the Navy expected the *2d Air Squadron* to accomplish a task that the *26th Flotilla* had found impossible—stemming the AirSols attack. In truth, however, all that was expected of the new planes and pilots was that they would preserve "as long as possible the strategic position to which the Truk advance base is the key." [31]

By the end of January, Rabaul was set up for a rain of knockout blows, a trip-hammer series of strikes that would batter it into impotence. In 873 daylight sorties during the month, AirSols bombers had dropped over 775 tons of bombs on airfields and shipping. The steady pounding had put each of the enemy fields out of action for varying periods of time, although the Japanese managed to keep at least one runway open for their interceptors. The shipping losses had been so severe that the enemy commanders knew that their principal supply line must soon be cut off.[32] The month's toll of defending aircraft, 120 according to Admiral Kusaka's postwar recollection,[33] was more than half of the planes available before the *2d Air Squadron* reinforcements arrived.

In view of the 1,850 escort and sweep sorties that Allied fighters flew over Rabaul in January, the combat loss of 65 planes was relatively low. Only 19 bombers of all types were shot down by Zekes or antiaircraft. In reckoning their tally of enemy planes for the month, AirSols pilots and gunners arrived at a figure of 503. Japanese aircrews claimed an even higher number of victories, 618 planes. Regardless of what the actual relative score was, one fact is certain, AirSols' combat losses had no dampening effect on the intensity of its offensive; the damage inflicted on the Japanese, however, was telling.

The *2d Air Squadron* pilots, many of them young men new to combat, aged quickly as they fought against increasingly unfavorable odds. The carrier group's operations officer, in recalling the atmosphere of the time, evoked a picture of real desperation:

> The days passed in a blur. Every day we sent the Zeros up on frantic interception flights. The young and inexperienced student pilots had become battle-hardened veterans, their faces showing the sudden realization of death all about them. Not for a moment did the Americans ease their relentless pressure. Day and night the bombers came to pound Rabaul, to smash at the airfield and shipping in the harbor, while the fighters screamed low in daring strafing passes, shooting up anything they considered a worthwhile target. . . .
>
> It was obvious that so long as we continued the battle in its present fashion, the Americans would grind us under.[34]

The Japanese could make no effective response to the relentless AirSols attacks. There were not enough enemy fighters on

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[31] *SE Area NavOps*—III, p. 62.

[32] CinCPac–CinCPOA Item No. 11,955. Diary of MajGen Masatake Kimihara, ACofS, Eighth AreaA, 1Jan–9Jun44, entry of 6Feb44, in CinCPac–CinCPOA Translations No. 1, dtd 31Oct44.

[33] USSBS, *Campaign Against Rabaul*, p. 50. *SE Area NavAirOps*—*V*, p. 19–a, lists losses for the month as 46.

[34] Okumiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, p. 309.

the scene even to slow down the pace, and those that were available were outclassed by newer and better Allied aircraft. The only other means of defense available to the Japanese, antiaircraft fire, was well countered by repeated light bomber strikes. As they had before at Munda and Kahili, Strike Command's SBDs concentrated on gun positions protecting the airfields, while TBFs ploughed up the runways. Complementing the SBD–TBF attacks, B–25 strafers laid a destructive spread of parafrag bombs throughout the airdrome areas, aiming particularly at aircraft on the ground. The attack pattern was varied enough to keep enemy gun crews harassed and apprehensive.

Perhaps the most discouraging aspect of the stepped-up Allied offensive to the Japanese was the order that had to be issued to the *2d Air Squadron* fighter pilots "to attack or defend yourselves only when the battle circumstances appear particularly favorable to you."[35] This official admission of Allied superiority put a severe crimp in enemy aircrew morale, even though the imbalance had been obvious for weeks. The massive AirSols attack formations, aggregating 200 planes a day by early February, were too strong to stop or turn aside.

Frequent bad weather was Rabaul's only sure defense, but its shielding effect often did not extend to alternate targets, particularly the airfields at Namatami and Borpop and the radar at Cape St. George on New Ireland.[36] These enemy installations were frequently attacked, since they directly supported Rabaul; the net effect of damage done to them was a reduction in the strength of the key Japanese base.

Everything began to turn sour for the Japanese in February, as concurrent operations in both the Southwest and Central Pacific made the Rabaul airbases untenable. Admiral Halsey was ready to move a New Zealand landing force into the Green Islands, only 115 miles from Rabaul, on the 15th. To support this operation and also to provide cover for a pending carrier attack on Truk, General Kenney's Fifth Air Force bombers began a series of large-scale raids on Kavieng on the 11th.[37] In the offing at the month's end was a SoWesPac move into the Admiralties to seize the enemy airfields there and cut off the Bismarcks from New Guinea.[38]

The net was closing on Rabaul, and the Japanese knew it. Yet neither the Kavieng air raids, the Green Islands landing, nor the enemy-anticipated invasion of the Admiralties was the deciding factor in the Japanese decision to pull all combat aircraft out of Rabaul.

Credit for forcing that move went to Central Pacific task forces under Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance which struck Truk on 17 and 18 February. Planes from nine carriers hit airfield installations and shipping in the atoll's anchorage in a two-day spree that saw at least 70 enemy planes destroyed in the air

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] The Marine Corps' third leading ace in World War II, First Lieutenant Robert M. Hanson of VMF–215, who shot down 25 planes, was killed by antiaircraft fire during a strafing run at Cape St. George on 3 February.

[37] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 355.

[38] Details on the Allied seizure of the Green Islands and the Admiralties will be covered in the following chapter.

LOADED FOR A RABAUL STRIKE, *Marine TBFs roll down a taxiway toward the Piva bomber runway on 17 February 1943.* (*USMC 81362*)

HEADED FOR VUNAKANAU, *a formation of Marine SBDs with bombs suspended from their wings takes part in the April strikes on Rabaul.* (*USMC 81436*)

and on the ground,[39] and more than 200,000 tons of merchant shipping sunk. Two enemy cruisers, four destroyers, and a subchaser were sent to the bottom by a combination of air and surface attacks.[40]

Admiral Nimitz, in ordering the strike on Truk, had hoped to catch the entire *Combined Fleet* in its lair. Photographs taken by two Marine PB4Ys of VMD-254 on 4 February had shown the enemy fleet to be present. The planes had taken off from the newly-built airfield on Stirling Island and flown unescorted the 1,000 miles to the Japanese bastion, taken their pictures, and returned after 12 hours in the air to land at the Piva bomber strip on Bougainville. Unfortunately, the Japanese had spotted one of the planes, although they were unable to intercept or bring it down.[41] The sight of the four-engined land bomber overhead, and the realization of all it portended with American forces firmly established in the Gilberts and Marshalls, was enough to convince Admiral Koga the time had come to pull back from his exposed position. Accordingly, the enemy commander ordered the *Combined Fleet* to weigh anchor and head for home waters. The bulk of the ships left on 10 February; most of the vessels caught by the American carrier attack a week later were auxiliaries and escorts delayed in sailing by the weather.

Many of the Japanese planes shot up on the ground at Truk were replacements meant for Rabaul. Their loss in the Carolines emphasized the futility of further aerial defense of the New Britain base. A good portion of the strategic value of Rabaul to the Japanese lay in its usefulness as a shield for Truk against attack. The twisted wreckage of the Zekes littering the atoll's airfields, the missing ships vanished beneath the waves of the anchorage, and the towering columns of smoke rising from gutted supply dumps gave ample evidence that Truk was vulnerable—and that Rabaul's role in its defense was ended.

On 17 February, as soon as news of the American carrier strike reached Admiral Koga, he dispatched orders to Admiral Kusaka to send all serviceable aircraft at Rabaul to Truk. The Carolines' base was only a way-station now, and the ultimate destination of these planes was airfields on the new Japanese defensive perimeter running from Western New Guinea through the Palaus, the Marianas, and the Volcano-Bonins.

On the night of 17–18 February, American destroyers lent insulting but unwitting emphasis to the enemy decision to strip Rabaul of its remaining offensive power. A bombardment group of five destroyers steamed through St. George's Channel with a PB4Y overhead to spot its targets and fired 3,868 rounds of 5-inch at enemy installations at Praed Point and in Rabaul town. At about the same time, a similar group of destroyers shelled Kavieng. Although Japanese coast defense guns replied in both instances, they

[39] RAdm Samuel Eliot Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. VII (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950), p. 320. Admiral Morison's history usually is the best informed source for assessment of Japanese losses. American claims of losses inflicted at the time of the attack ranged from 128 to more than 200 planes.

[40] NavHistDiv, Off of CNO, ND, *United States Naval Chronology, World War II* (Washington, 1955), pp. 77–78.

[41] NavAnalysisDiv, USSBS(Pac), *The Reduction of Truk* (Washington: GPO, Feb47), p. 4.

hit nothing, and the raiders retired unscathed.[42] There was no aerial pursuit.

What last-gasp resistance there was from the *2d Air Squadron* was offered on the morning of 19 February when 36 Zekes rose to intercept a 139-plane attack formation, centered on 71 Strike Command bombers. The SBDs and TBFs which hit Lakunai included six Avengers of VMTB–143 armed with both 500-pound bombs and 5-inch rockets, the latter a relatively new air weapon which proved effective against point targets. When the AirSols escort and the Japanese interceptors tangled, the respective claims were 23 planes shot down by American pilots[43] and 31 by Japanese. A B–24 strike group which followed the light bombers to attack Tobera and Lakunai was also intercepted; the Liberator crews claimed three Zekes. AirSols actual loss was one Corsair with 10 planes damaged; the Japanese loss appears to have been eight fighters.[44]

On 20 February, the only aircraft remaining in Rabaul were about 30 damaged fighters, a few Navy utility types, and 4 Army reconnaissance planes.[45] An attempt was made to evacuate some of the invaluable veteran ground crews in two of the last merchant vessels to visit Rabaul, but AirSols bombers sank the vessels on the 21st. The next day, American destroyers cruising the waters off New Ireland sank the rescue tug that picked up the survivors. The loss of the maintenance crews, whose skills represented the experience of many years, was equally as damaging to the Japanese naval air arm as the loss of veteran air crews in combat with Rabaul's attackers.

Although the men of AirSols had no way of knowing it, they had won the air battle of Rabaul; the Japanese would never come back. No exact figure for the number of enemy planes that escaped to Truk can be established, but a consensus of the recollections of key officers of the *Eleventh Air Fleet* would indicate no more than 70 got out, although one source says 120 made it.[46] Even this larger figure makes little difference in the overall assessment of the results of the AirSols offensive.

In the two months that passed between the first Allied fighter sweep over Rabaul on 17 December and the last opposed bombing raid of 19 February, the Japanese lost at least 250 planes, and very probably more. Again the records are incomplete and contradictory, but only as to the number of planes involved, not as to the fact of defeat and withdrawal. Emphasizing the difficulty of assessing the claims of air warfare is the first box score compiled for the 17 December–19 February battle by intelligence officers at ComAirSoPac—151 Allied planes lost in destroying 789 Japanese planes.[47] The comparable Japanese claim for the same period—

[42] ComFAirWingOne Rept of Night Missions, 17–18Feb44, dtd 27Feb44 (COA, NHD).

[43] New Zealand P–40s escorting TBFs hitting Vunakanau on 13 February shot down two Zekes bringing the total RNZAF score in the Pacific to 99. Much to the disappointment of the New Zealanders, they never got the century.

[44] Pineau, "Summary of Enemy Air Raids on Rabaul," *op. cit.;* ComAirSols Bombers and Fighters Mission Rept, 19Feb44.

[45] MilAnalysisDiv, USSBS(Pac), Answer to Questionnaire No. 5, Bismarck and Solomon Islands, 7Dec41–19Feb44, prepared under LtCol Sakuyuki Takagi, IJA (USSBS Recs, National Archives).

[46] *Miyazaki Interrogation*, p. 414.

[47] ComAirSoPac IntelBul, dtd 22Feb44.

this from a postwar history of their operations by the Japanese—was that they lost 142 of their own planes in shooting down 1,045 Allied aircraft.[48]

The withdrawal of the Japanese defending aircraft on 19 February 1944 did not signify the end of the Allied air offensive against Rabaul. Far from it. The aerial attack went on—and on—and on. It continued in an unceasing round until the end of the war, and hundreds of combat aircraft, many of them Marine planes, took part in the frustrating campaign to neutralize the enemy base. The Japanese fought back, at least the antiaircraft gunners did, whenever they were offered a target; the rest of the huge enemy garrison was immobilized, dug in and waiting for an amphibious assault that never came.

The story of those 18 months of hazardous but largely routine aerial attacks on Rabaul should be considered apart from the few weeks of intensive air battles that ended the offensive threat of the key enemy base. In that short span of fighting, as in the preceding months of methodical advance that made it possible, no one service can claim to have had the pre-eminent part. In a very real sense, Admiral Halsey's South Pacific Forces, and in particular, Aircraft, Solomons, were joint commands. The admiral once rather pithily recalled:

> Whenever I hear blather about interservice friction, I like to recall that our Army, Navy, and Marine airmen in the Solomons fought with equal enthusiasm and excellence under rear admirals, then under a major general of the Army, and finally under a major general of Marines.[49]

[48] *SE Area NavOps—III*, p. 59.

[49] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 186.

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PART VI

Conclusion

Encirclement

In the late summer of 1943, while the Joint Chiefs were deciding to neutralize Rabaul rather than capture it, General MacArthur's staff was preparing plans for the operations which would follow Bougainville and Cape Gloucester and complete the encirclement of the key New Britain base. With a tentative target date of 1 March 1944, MacArthur intended to seize Kavieng, using SoPac forces, and the Admiralties, employing his own SWPA troops, planes, and ships. The establishment of Allied airfields at Finschhafen and Cape Gloucester meant that the Admiralties' landings could be covered adequately by land-based fighters, but Kavieng operations required carrier air support. Even the boost in range given SoPac fighters by airfields at Cape Torokina would not be enough to provide effective escorts and combat air patrols over Kavieng.

Once the Central Pacific offensive got underway with operations in the Gilberts, it appeared that mounting demands on the Pacific Fleet's shipping resources would serve to put off D-Day at Kavieng until about 1 May 1944.[1] Faced with the possibility that there would be "a six months interval between major South Pacific operations" which might "kill the momentum of the South Pacific drive," Admiral Halsey consulted General MacArthur, who gave "his unqualified approval" to the scheme for an intermediate operation "which would keep the offensive rolling, provide another useful base, and keep the pressure on the enemy." [2]

As Halsey ordered his staff to prepare the plans for the seizure of the Green Islands, the intermediate target he had selected, he also directed them to study the possibility of seizing Emirau Island in the St. Matthias Group as an alternative to Kavieng. ComSoPac felt that the time was ripe for another bypass operation, one that would achieve the same objective as the proposed large-scale Kavieng assault, but at much less cost. The admiral argued vigorously for his point of view at Pearl Harbor in late December, and in Washington in January, during a short leave he spent in the States.[3]

Although General MacArthur indicated on 20 December that the possession of airfields at either Kavieng or Emirau would accomplish his mission of choking off access to Rabaul,[4] he was soon firm again in his belief that the New Ireland base would have to be captured. This was the stand that SWPA representatives took at a coordinating conference held on 27 January

[1] ComSoPac 1st end, dtd 29Apr44, to ComIII-PhibFor Rept of the Seizure and Occupation of Green Islands, 15Feb–15Mar44, dtd 16Apr44.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, pp. 186–188.

[4] SJC [MajGen Samuel J. Chamberlin] memo for jnl, dtd 21Dec43, Subj: Conference at GHQ, 20Dec43, in *GHQ G–3 Jnl.*

at Pearl Harbor, where preparations went ahead for a simultaneous assault on Kavieng and the Admiralties. The new tentative target date was 1 April, a month and a half after SoPac forces were slated to secure the Green Islands.

GREEN AND ADMIRALTY ISLANDS LANDINGS [5]

Before the Green Islands was chosen as the next SoPac objective after Bougainville, several other prospective targets were considered and rejected. A proposal to seize a foothold in the Tanga Islands, 35 miles east of New Ireland, was turned down because the operation could not be effectively covered by land-based fighters. Similarly, the capture of enemy airstrips at Borpop or Namatami was discarded because carrier support as well as a large landing force, would be required to handle Japanese resistance.[6] Nissan, the largest of the Green Islands, was not only close enough to Torokina for AirSols fighter support, but also was weakly defended. (See Map 32.)

Located 37 miles northwest of Buka and 55 miles east of New Ireland, Nissan is an oval-shaped atoll 8 miles long with room on its narrow, flat main island for a couple of air strips. With Rabaul only 115 miles away and Kavieng about a hundred miles farther off, the Allied objective was clearly vulnerable to enemy counterattack once it was taken. By 15 February, however, the swing of fortune against the Japanese made that risk readily acceptable. In fact, Admiral Halsey reported that the campaign to neutralize Rabaul's air strength "had succeeded beyond our fondest hopes." [7]

Although aerial photographs and the scanty terrain intelligence available regarding the Green Islands indicated that Nissan was suitable for airfield development, nothing sure was known. A 24-hour reconnaissance in force, to be launched close enough to D-Day to prevent undue warning and consequent reinforcement of the garrison, was decided upon to obtain detailed information. New Zealand infantrymen of the 30th Battalion made up the main body of the 330-man scouting party; they were reinforced by American Navy specialists who would conduct the necessary harbor, beach, and airfield surveys.

The landing force loaded on board APDs at Vella Lavella at midday on 29 January, rehearsed the operation that evening, and got underway for the target at dawn. Escorted and screened by destroyers, the high-speed transports hove to off Nissan just after midnight and started debarking troops immediately The column of LCVPs was led into the atoll lagoon by two PT boats that had sounded a clear passage during a previous reconnaissance mission. By 0100, all troops were ashore near the proposed airfield site;

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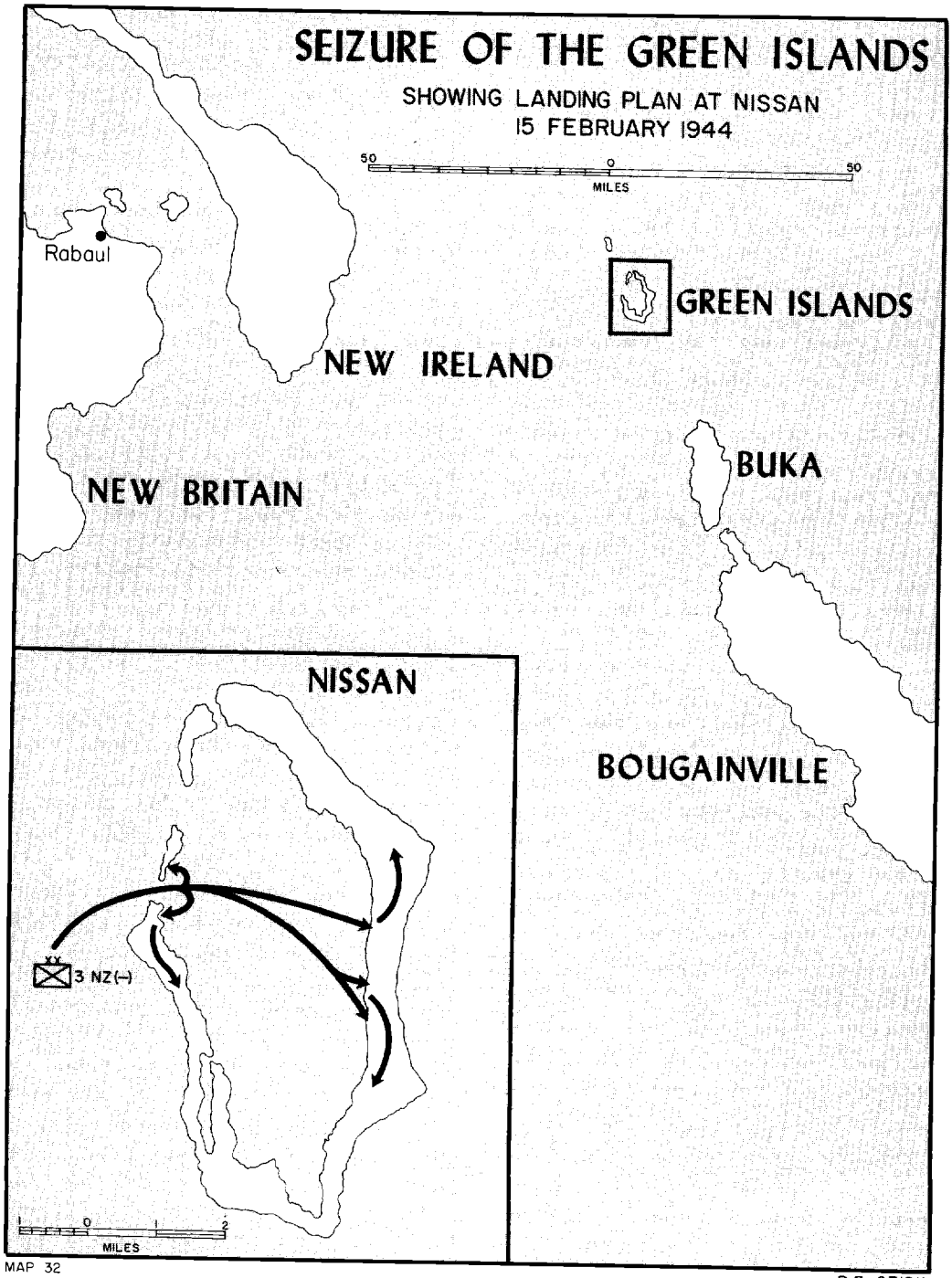
[5] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *GHQ G–3 Jnl;* ComIIIPhibFor Rept of the Seizure and Occupation of GreenIs, 15Feb–15Mar44, dtd 16Apr44 (COA, NHD); CO StrikeComdGreen Rept, dtd 21May44 (COA, NHD); ComDesron 45 (CTG 31.8) AR, 28Jan–1Feb44, dtd 10Feb44 (COA, NHD); *SE Area NavOps—III;* Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story;* Miller *Reduction of Rabaul;* Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Warren, "Fifth AF in the Bismarcks."

[6] ComIIIPhibFor Rept of the Seizure and Occupation of GreenIs, 15Feb–15Mar44, dtd 24Mar44 (COA, NHD), cancelled by ComIIIPhibFor Rept, dtd 16Apr44, *op. cit.*

[7] ComSoPac 1st end, dtd 29Apr44, to ComIII PhibFor Rept, dtd 16Apr44, *op. cit.*


SEIZURE OF THE GREEN ISLANDS
SHOWING LANDING PLAN AT NISSAN
15 FEBRUARY 1944
50 0 50
MILES
Rabaul
GREEN ISLANDS
NEW IRELAND
NEW BRITAIN
BUKA
BOUGAINVILLE
NISSAN
XX
3 NZ(–)
1 0 1 2
MILES
MAP 32
R.F. STIBIL

there was no sign of enemy opposition. Once it was obvious that the landing was safely effected, the transports and escorts shoved off for the Treasurys in order to be well away from Nissan by daylight.

The atoll reconnaissance started when dawn broke, and the findings were very encouraging. Preliminary estimates that Nissan could accommodate a fair-sized airbase and that its lagoon and beaches could handle landing ships proved accurate, and, despite evidence that about 100 Japanese occupied the islands, there was only one clash with the defenders. In an exchange of fire with a well-hidden machine gun, an LCVP-borne scouting party lost three men and had seven others wounded. Showing that Rabaul was well aware of the raid, seven Zekes appeared during the afternoon to strafe and bomb the landing craft; one sailor was killed and two were wounded.

Right on schedule, at 0010 on 1 February, the APDs and their escorts arrived in the transport area off Nissan. After breasting a choppy sea, the landing craft and the troops were all back on board ship by 0145. On the return voyage, the escorts added a bonus prize to the successful mission when the destroyers *Guest* and *Hudson* sank a Japanese submarine, the *I–171*, with a barrage of depth charges.

Since the reconnaissance of Nissan confirmed earlier estimates of its value as an objective, Admiral Halsey's operation plan for its capture, issued on 24 January, went unchanged. Admiral Wilkinson, as Commander Task Force 31, was directed to seize the Green Islands using Major General H. E. Barrowclough's 3d New Zealand Division (less the 8th Brigade) as the landing force. ComAirSols would provide reconnaissance and air cover, and as in previous SoPac operations, a commander and staff to control air activities at the objective. Brigadier General Field Harris, well experienced in this type of assignment after similar service at Bougainville, was designated ComAirGreen. To cover the landings, two cruiser-destroyer task forces would range the waters north, east, and south of the islands, while a tightly echeloned procession of APDs, LCIs, and LSTs ran in toward the target from the west, unloaded, and got clear as soon as possible. The possibility of a Japanese surface attack could not be discounted with Truk presumably still the main *Combined Fleet* base, and an aerial counterattack from Rabaul and Kavieng was not only possible but probable.

The pending assault did not catch the Japanese unawares, but the incessant AirSols strikes on *Eleventh Air Fleet* bases at Rabaul, coupled with RAAF and Fifth Air Force attacks on Kavieng, gave the enemy no chance for effective countermeasures. The original garrison of the Green Islands, 12 naval lookouts and 60 soldiers who operated a barge relay station, fled to the nearby Feni Islands on 1 February after briefly engaging the Allied reconnaissance force. About a third of these men returned to Nissan on the 5th to reinforce a small naval guard detachment that had been sent by submarine from Rabaul after word of the Allied landing was received. The combined garrison stood at 102 men on 14 February, when Japanese scout planes reported that a large convoy of transports, screened by cruisers and destroyers, was headed north from the waters off Bougainville's west coast.

Japanese aircraft harassed the oncoming ships throughout the moonlit night approach, but managed to score on only

one target, the light cruiser *St. Louis*, which steamed on despite damage and casualties from one bomb hit and three near misses. The amphibious shipping reached its destination unscathed, and, at 0620, the first wave of New Zealander assault troops from the APDs was boated on the line of departure. In order to spare the atoll's natives, there was no preliminary or covering fire as the LCVPs raced shoreward. AirSols planes were overhead, however, ready to pounce on any Japanese resistance that showed, destroyers had their guns trained ashore, and LCI gunboats shepherded the landing craft to the beaches.

All landings were unopposed, the first at 0655 on small islets at the entrance to the lagoon and those immediately following which were made near the prospective airfield site. About 15 Japanese dive bombers attempted to hit the transports at about this time, but a fury of antiaircraft fire from every available gun caused them to sheer off after some ineffectual bombing. The AirSols combat air patrol, all from VMF–212, claimed six of the attacking planes; the Japanese admitted losses of four Bettys, two Kates, six Vals, and a Rufe during both the night heckling and the unsuccessful thrust at the landing ships.

The New Zealanders sent patrols out as soon as the landing force was firmly set up ashore, but these encountered only slight resistance. The operation proceeded smoothly and without encountering any unforeseen snags. As soon as the APDs discharged the assault troops, they picked up an escort and headed south, while 12 LCIs beached on Nissan and quickly unloaded. At 0835, an hour before the LCIs left, 7 LSTs, each loaded with 500 tons of vehicles and bulk cargo, entered and crossed the lagoon and nosed into shore. When the LSTs retired at 1730, Admiral Wilkinson in his flagship and the remainder of TF 31's ships accompanied them, leaving behind 6 LCTs to serve the budding base.

On D-Day, 5,800 men had been landed—to stay. Although there were almost 100,000 Japanese troops located close by on the Gazelle Peninsula and New Ireland, they were held at bay by superior Allied air and naval strength. The situation of the Japanese units located south of the newest SoPac outpost was "hopeless" in General MacArthur's view, and he reported to the JCS that the successful landing "rings the curtain down on [the] Solomons campaign." [8]

Despite the overwhelming odds against them, the defenders of Nissan Atoll fought tenaciously against the New Zealanders, killing 10 and wounding 21 of the 3d Division's men in 5 days of mopping-up action.[9] The last pocket of resistance was not wiped out until the 19th when the Japanese remnant sent Admiral Kusaka the message: "We are charging the enemy and beginning radio silence." [10]

What little help Rabaul could offer its doomed outguard on Nissan was confined to night bombing, and even that proved costly and futile for the Japanese. The attacking planes lost three of their number to VMF(N)–531 Venturas vectored to their targets by one of the squadron's GCI teams. Even the nuisance value of night raiders was lost when the *Combined Fleet* ordered all flyable aircraft out of Rabaul

[8] MacArthur disps to Marshall, dtd 14Feb44 and 15Feb44, in *GHQ G–3 Jnl.*

[9] Gillespie, *New Zealand History*, p. 188.

[10] *SE Area NavOps–III*, p. 62.

on the 19th. With the departure of defending Zekes, the New Britain base lay wide open to AirSols attack, particularly to strikes that could be mounted or staged from fields in the Green Islands. Even more important, Kavieng, where the Japanese still had some planes, was within easy reach of fighters and light bombers dispatched by ComAirGreen.

Seabee units outdid themselves and surpassed all base development goals. The fighter field was able to handle its first emergency landing on 4 March, the date on which Admiral Wilkinson passed command of the Green Islands to General Barrowclough. Three days later, AirSols fighters staged through Green, as Nissan was usually called, to attack Kavieng. Completion of the bomber field was scheduled for 1 April, but the first group of light bombers, 36 SBDs and 24 TBFs from Piva, was able to stage for a strike and hit Kavieng on 16 March. On the 19th, VMSB–243, VMTB–134, and part of VB–98 were detached from Strike Command, Piva and shifted to Green and General Harris' command.

The light bombers did not get to settle in at their home field for a while though, but shared instead the fighter strip with the Corsairs of VMF–114 and –212. The Thirteenth Air Force pre-empted the bomber field when its B–24s landed on Green en route to strikes on Truk. Until hardstands for the Liberators were completed on 15 April, the Marine and Navy bombers competed with Seabee construction equipment for room. "Frequently trucks hauling coral would be sandwiched between sections of planes taxiing and often [an] entire strike [group] would inch by fighters parked along the ends of the taxiway. Each TBF would have to taxi with folded wings and unfold them only when in position along the strip." [11]

The temporary crowding served a useful purpose, however; it made maximum use of Green's airfields at a time when many of the missions flown by AirSols planes helped isolate the newest Bismarck's battleground, the Admiralties. The seizure of these islands, 200 miles from Wewak and 260 miles from Kavieng, snapped the last link between General Imamura and his *Eighth Area Army* troops fighting on New Guinea.

In terms of their eventual usefulness, the Admiralties far outshone any other strategic objective that was seized during the operations against Rabaul. Seeadler Harbor, contained in the hook-like embrace of the two main islands, Manus and Los Negros, is, if anything, as fine as Rabaul's harbor and well able to handle warships and auxiliaries of all sizes. In 1942, at Lorengau village on Manus, the largest island, the Japanese had built an airfield and followed up in 1943 by constructing another at Momote Plantation on Los Negros. Both fields were used as staging points for traffic between Rabaul and New Guinea. (See Map 33.)

When Allied advances on the Huon Peninsula and in the Solomons threatened the Bismarcks area, Admiral Kusaka and General Imamura both ordered more of their troops into the Admiralties. A naval garrison unit from New Ireland was able to get through to Lorengau in early December, but ships carrying Army reinforcements from Japan and the Palaus were either sunk by American submarines or turned back by the threat of their torpedoes. In late January, Imamura dispatched one infantry battalion from

[11] CO StrikeComdGreen Rept, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

SEABEE EQUIPMENT *is unloaded from an LST at Nissan Island on D-Day of the Green Islands operation.* (*USMC 77990*)

FIRST WAVE ASHORE *on Los Negros, troopers of the 1st Cavalry Division, advance toward Momote airfield.* (*SC 187412*)

Kavieng and another from Rabaul on board destroyers that reached Seeadler despite harassment by Allied aircraft. These soldiers, together with those of a transport regiment and the naval contingent already present, made up a formidable defense force of about 4,400 men.

Realizing that he was charged with defending a prize that the Allies could ill afford to ignore, the Japanese commander in the Admiralties decided that deception was one of his most effective weapons. When General Kenney's planes attacked Lorengau and Momote airfields, the enemy leader ordered his men not to fire back. He told them, in fact, not to show themselves at all in daylight. His ruse had the desired effect; reconnaissance planes could spot few traces of enemy activity. On 23 February, three B-25s "cruised over Manus and Los Negros for ninety minutes at minimum altitude without having a shot fired at them or seeing any signs of activity either on the airdromes or along the beaches." [12] To American Generals Kenney and Whitehead, the situation seemed ripe for a reconnaissance in force, one that might open the way for an early occupation of the Admiralties and the consequent upgrading of the target dates for all later operations.

General MacArthur, impressed by the promise of a quick seizure of an important objective, accepted General Kenney's proposal that a small force carried on destroyers and APDs land on Los Negros and seize Momote airfield, repair it, and hold it ready for reinforcement by air if it proved necessary. In case Japanese resistance proved too stiff, the reconnaissance force could be withdrawn by sea. If, on the other hand, the enemy garrison was weak, the original landing force would be strong enough to hold its own and open the way for reinforcing echelons.

Acting on General MacArthur's orders, issued on 24 February, the 1st Cavalry Division (Major General Innis P. Swift) organized a task force of about 1,000 men, most of them from its 1st Brigade, to make the initial landing. If all went well, follow-up echelons would bring in more cavalrymen plus Seabees and other supporting troops to mop up the Japanese and begin base construction. Commanding the reconnaissance force, its backbone the 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry, was Brigadier General William C. Chase. The SWPA's veteran amphibious force commander, Admiral Barbey, was responsible for the conduct of the operation. General MacArthur decided that both he and Admiral Kinkaid would accompany the attack group that transported Chase's troops in order to evaluate at first hand the results of the reconnaissance.

On 27 February, two days before D-Day, a small party of ALAMO scouts landed on Los Negros about a mile south of Momote; they reported the jungle there to be a bivouac area alive with enemy troops. The scouts' finding was too inconclusive to bring about any change in the size of Chase's force, but the information did result in the detail of a cruiser and two destroyers to blanket the bivouac area with naval gunfire when the landing was attempted. The rest of the covering force, another cruiser and two more destroyers, was assigned Lorengau and Seeadler Harbor as an area of coverage. Nine destroyers of the attack group, each transporting about 57 troopers, were assigned fire support areas which would di-

[12] Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan*, p. 559.

rectly cover the landing attempt. Three APDs, each with 170 men on board, would land the first three waves of assault troops.

The chosen landing area, a beach near the airfield, could be reached only through a 50-yard-wide opening in the fringing reef that closed the narrow entrance to a small harbor on the eastern shore of Los Negros. The site seemed so improbable for a landing that the Japanese concentrated most of their strength to meet an attack from the Seeadler Harbor side of the island.

On 27 February, the 1st Cavalry Division troops boarded ship at Oro Bay, and the attack group moved out to rendezvous with its escort off Cape Sudest. Through a heavy overcast on the morning of the 29th, the American ships approached the Admiralties and deployed to bombardment and debarkation stations off the coast of Los Negros. At 0728, three B–24s bombed Momote, but poor visibility cancelled out most of the rest of the preparatory air strikes. Cruisers and destroyers began shelling the island at 0740 and continued firing as the troops in LCVPs crossed the line of departure, 3,700 yards out, and headed for the beach. Fifteen minutes later, as the first wave passed through the harbor channel, enemy machine guns on the headlands opened fire on the boats while heavier guns took on the cruisers and destroyers. Counterbattery fire was prompt and effective; the Japanese guns fell silent. At 0810, a star shell fired from the cruiser *Phoenix* signalled the end of naval gunfire and brought in three B–25s, all that had reached the target in the foul flying weather, to strafe and bomb the gun positions on the headlands.

The first troops were on the beach at 0817 and moving inland; the few Japanese defenders in the vicinity pulled back in precipitous haste. Enemy gun crews manning the weapons interdicting the entrance channel began firing again when naval gunfire lifted. Destroyers pounded the gun positions immediately and drove the crews to cover, a pattern of action that was repeated throughout the morning. The American landings continued despite the Japanese fire, and by 1250, General Chase's entire command had landed. The cost of the operation thus far was two soldiers killed and three wounded, a toll doubled by casualties among the LCVP crews. Five enemy dead were counted.

The cavalrymen advanced across the airfield during the afternoon, but pulled back to man a tight 1,500-yard-long perimeter anchored on the beach for night defense. General MacArthur and Admiral Kinkaid went ashore about 1600, conferred with General Chase, and heard the reports that the cavalrymen had run across signs of a considerable number of enemy troops. After assessing the available intelligence, and viewing the situation personally, the SWPA commander ordered General Chase to stay put and hold his position at the airfield's eastern edge. As soon as the senior commanders were back on board ship, orders were dispatched to send up more troops and supplies to reinforce the embattled soldiers. Two destroyers remained offshore to furnish call-fire support when the rest of the task group departed at 1729.

The first of the counterattacks that the cavalrymen expected, and had prepared for as best they could with their limited means, came that night. The Japanese on Los Negros, who outnumbered the Ameri-

cans handily, did not take advantage of their strength and made no headway in a series of small-scale attacks that sometimes penetrated the perimeter but never seriously threatened the integrity of the position. With daylight, American patrols pushed out from their lines until they ran into heavy enemy resistance, then pulled back to let the destroyers and the force's two 75mm howitzers fire on the Japanese. Aircraft made nine supply drops for the cavalrymen during the day, and, toward evening, Fifth Air Force planes bombed the enemy positions, despite the ineffectual attacks of several Japanese Army fighters which showed up from Wewak. There was an unsuccessful assault on the cavalrymen's lines at dusk, and another night of infiltration attempts that ended with a two-day count of 147 Japanese dead within American lines.

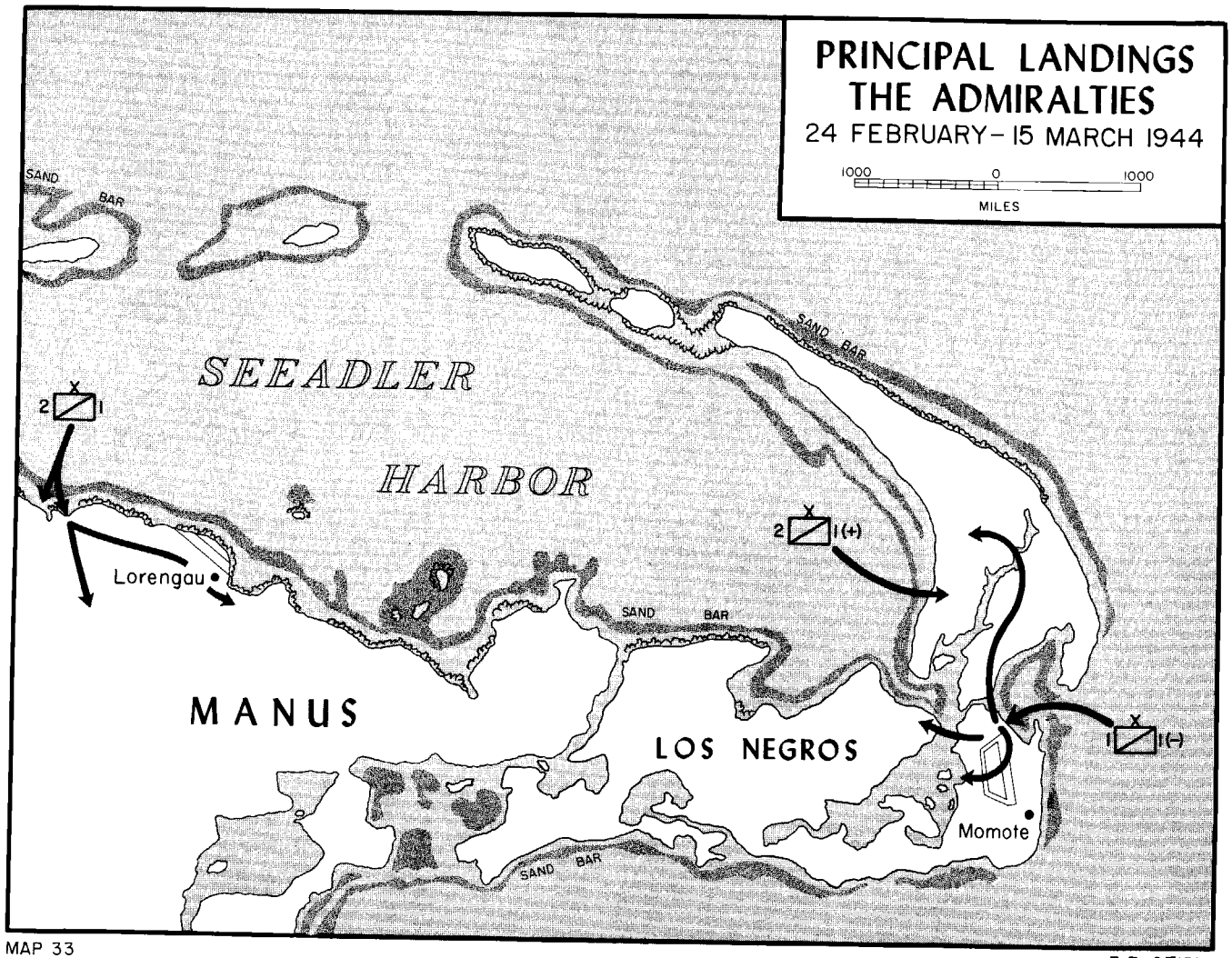
By dawn of 2 March, the Japanese had lost their chance to drive out the reconnaissance force, for the first reinforcement echelon, 1,500 more troopers and 428 Seabees, stood offshore. An American destroyer and two minesweepers of the landing ship escort attempted to force the entrance of Seeadler Harbor, but uncovered a hornet's nest of coast defense guns which forced them to sheer off. Warned away from Seeadler for the time being, the amphibious craft landed their troops and cargo on the beaches guarded by Chase's men.

Once the fresh troops were ashore, General Chase attacked and seized the airfield against surprisingly light resistance. There was ample evidence, however, that the Japanese were readying an all-out attack. It came on the night of 3–4 March, a night of furious fighting that saw 61 Americans killed and 244 wounded, with 9 of the dead and 38 of the wounded Seabees, who backed up the cavalry's lines. At the focal point of the attack, 167 enemy soldiers fell; hundreds more fell all along the perimeter.

The remainder of the 1st Cavalry Division joined its advance forces in the Admiralties during the following week. The Japanese on Los Negros were either killed or driven in retreat to Manus. Air and ship bombardment eliminated the enemy guns that had shielded the Seeadler entrance, and on 9 March, the 2d Cavalry Brigade entered the harbor and landed on Los Negros. The cavalry division commander, General Swift, now planned the seizure of Lorengau airdrome and the capture of Manus.

On 15 March, following a series of actions that cleared the small islands fringing the harbor of the enemy, the 2d Brigade landed on Manus and fought its way to the airfield. Even though the main objective was quickly secured, the big island was far from won. It was two months before the combat phase of the operation was ended and the last organized resistance in the Admiralties faded. The count of Japanese dead reached 3,280, 75 men were captured, and another 1,100 were estimated to have died and been buried by their own comrades. The 1st Cavalry Division lost 326 troopers and had 1,189 of its men wounded in the protracted and bitter fighting.

While the battle raged, the naval construction battalions and the Army engineers turned to on the airfields and naval base projected for the islands. Momote was operational by 7 March, and, on the 9th, a squadron of Australian Kittyhawks from Kiriwina moved in as part of the garrison. The RAAF planes, soon reinforced, flew cover for B–25 bombers at first and then began to fly bombing and



MAP 33

R.F. STIBIL

strafing strikes of their own in support of the cavalrymen's offensive. On 16 March, the Australian squadrons were given the primary mission of protecting all Allied shipping in the vicinity of the Admiralties.[13]

When Lorengau airfield proved unsuitable for extensive development, the engineers and Seabees shifted their tools and machines to Mokerang Plantation on Los Negros, about 7,000 yards northwest of Momote on the Seeadler shore. The new field was operational by 21 April. The naval base, including two landing strips for carrier aircraft on outlying islands, flourished. Manus, as the whole base complex was generally known, grew to be as important in staging and supporting Allied operations during 1944 as Guadalcanal had been in 1943 and Espiritu Santo in 1942.

EMIRAU: THE LAST LINK [14]

At one time in the planning for the operations that would follow Bougainville and Cape Gloucester, General MacArthur and his staff had considered it necessary to make a landing at Hansa Bay between the Japanese *Eighteenth Army's* bases at Madang and Wewak. The early and successful move into the Admiralties, from which planes could easily interdict both enemy positions, crystallized opinion against the Hansa Bay venture. In its stead, on 5 March, MacArthur proposed to the JCS that he completely bypass the Madang-Wewak area and take a long step forward in his advance toward the Philippines by seizing Hollandia in Netherlands New Guinea. In the same message, the general reaffirmed his conviction that Kavieng had to be taken to insure the complete neutralization of Rabaul.

In Washington, where the need for taking Kavieng had been seriously questioned, considerable weight was obviously given to Admiral Halsey's opinion, voiced in person in January, that "the geography of the area begged for another bypass," [15] and that:

> . . . the seizure of an airfield site in the vicinity of the St. Matthias Group appeared to be a quick, cheap operation which would insure the complete neutralization of Kavieng and complete the isolation of Rabaul and the Bismarcks in general. Furthermore, the Carolines would be brought just that much nearer as a target for our own aerial operation.[16]

The fact that Admiral Nimitz joined in recommending that the Kavieng operation be dropped in favor of the much less expensive seizure of Emirau may have been decisive.

On 12 March, the JCS issued a new directive for future operations in the Pacific, cancelling Kavieng and Hansa Bay and ordering the capture of Hollandia and Emirau, the latter as soon as possible. General MacArthur immediately issued

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[13] Odgers, *RAAF Against Japan*, pp. 174–180.

[14] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *GHQ G–3 Jnl;* CTF 31 Rept of the Seizure and Occupation of Emirau Island, 20Mar–7Apr44, dtd 16Apr44; CG Emirau LdgFor Rept of Ops, 15Mar–9Apr, dtd 20Apr44; *1st MAW Feb–Apr44 WarDs*; Kenneth W. Condit and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch, A History of the 4th Marines* (Washington: HistBr, G–3 Div, HQMC, 1960); Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*; Miller, *Reduction of Rabaul*; Morison, *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier;* Rentz *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons.*

[15] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 188.

[16] ComSoPac 1st end, dtd 1May44, to CTF 31 Rept, dtd 16Apr44, *op. cit.*

orders halting preparations for the Kavieng attack, then only 18 days away, and directed Admiral Halsey to seize Emirau instead, using a minimum of ground combat forces. In his turn, ComSoPac ordered his amphibious force commander, Admiral Wilkinson, to take the new objective by 20 March and recommended that the 4th Marines be used as the landing force. The message from Halsey at Noumea to Wilkinson at Guadalcanal was received early on the morning of 15 March when loading had already started for Kavieng.

The I Marine Amphibious Corps, composed of the 3d Marine Division and 40th Infantry Division, had been the chosen landing force for Kavieng. For that operation, the 3d Division was reinforced by the 4th Marines, and the regiment was ready to load out when word was received of the change in plans. Fortunately, the headquarters of III Amphibious Force, IMAC, the 4th Marines, and the transport group which was to carry the troops to the target were close together and planning got underway immediately. General Geiger noted that the several staffs "had only about six or eight hours to work up the Emirau plans" [17] that had resulted from Admiral Halsey's earlier interest in the island as a SoPac objective. Late in the afternoon of the 15th, the admiral flew in to Guadalcanal from New Caledonia and quickly approved the concept of operations that had been developed.

Commodore Lawrence F. Reifsnider was to command the amphibious operation, with Brigadier General Alfred H. Noble, ADC of the 3d Marine Division, in command of the landing force. General Noble, who was also slated to become the island's first commander, had a small staff made up of IMAC and 3d Division personnel. An air command unit for Emirau, under Marine Colonel William L. McKittrick, was formed from the larger headquarters that had been organized to control air operations at Kavieng.

The 4th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Alan Shapley, was the newly formed successor to the regiment captured on Corregidor.[18] It was activated on 1 February from former raider units, after the Commandant decided there was no longer enough need to justify the existence of battalions specially raised for hit-and-run tactics.[19] On the 22d, the Commandant directed General Geiger to reinforce the regiment by the addition of a pack howitzer battalion, engineer, medical, tank, and motor transport companies, and reconnaissance, ordnance, war dog, and service and supply platoons. Only the tank and medical companies had been added by the date the regiment sailed for Emirau. For the landing operation, the 3d Division provided amphibian tractor and pioneer companies and motor transport and ordnance platoons; the 14th Defense Battalion furnished a composite automatic weapons battery.

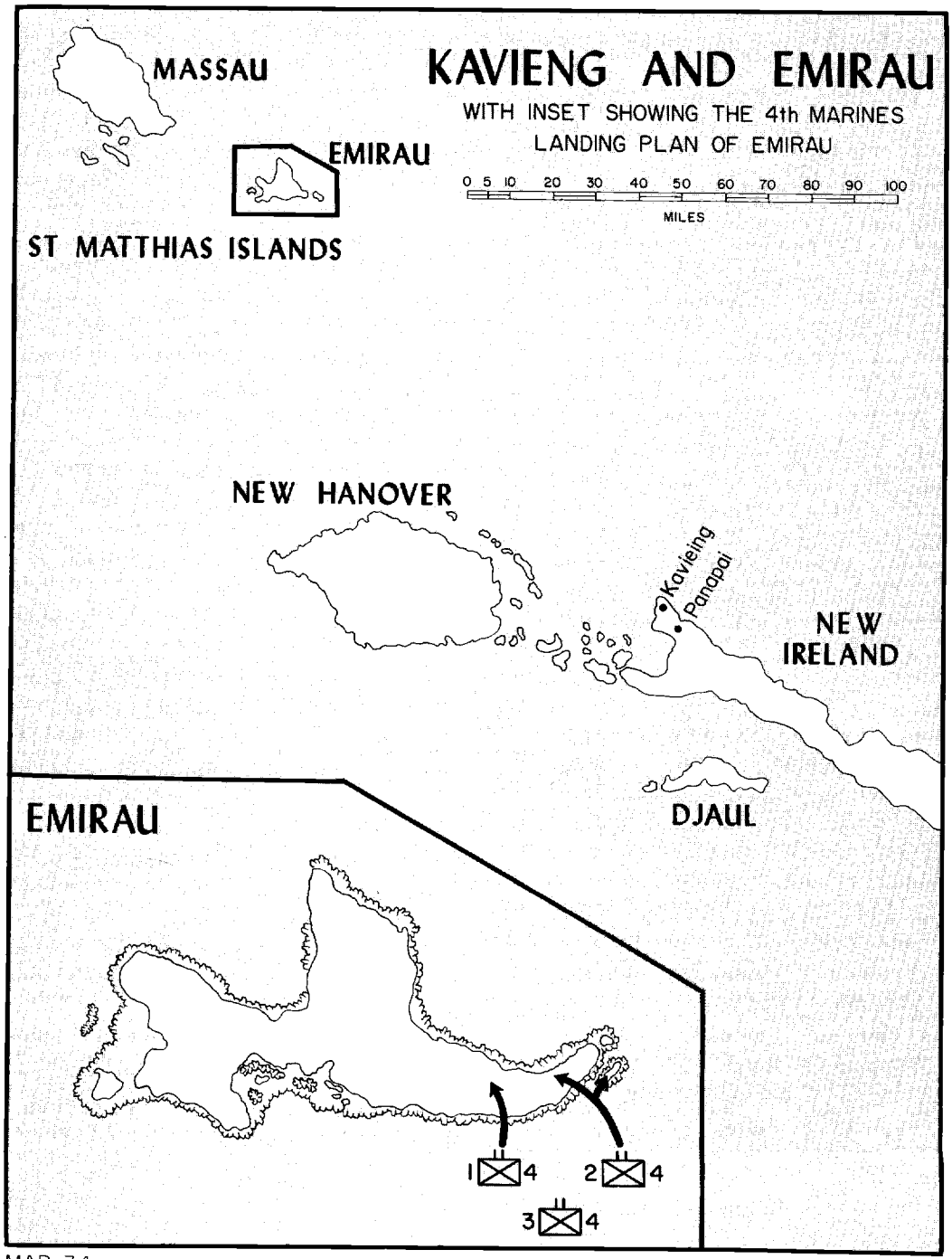
The pace of preparations for Emirau was so swift that it put a temporary crimp

[17] MajGen Roy S. Geiger ltr to LtGen Alexander A. Vandegrift, dtd 25Mar44 (Vandegrift Personal Correspondence File, HQMC).

[18] The story of the 4th Marines' defense of Corregidor's beaches it told in Part IV of Volume I of this series.

[19] The Headquarters and Service Company of the 1st Raider Regiment and the 1st, 3d, and 4th Raider Battalions become the Headquarters and Service Company and the 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions of the 4th Marines. The 2d Raider Battalion formed the regimental weapons company.

691-360 O—63——34



MAP 34

R.F. STIBIL

in JCS plans for the employment of the Marines released by the cancellation of Kavieng. On 14 March, MacArthur received and passed on to Halsey for compliance, a JCS directive that the 3d Marine Division, the 4th Marines, and the 9th and 14th Defense Battalions were to be released to the control of CinCPOA immediately. By the time the admiral received this order, it was too late to replace the 4th Marines and still meet Emirau's D-Day of 20 March; some platoons of the 14th Defense Battalion were already on board ship. Consequently, ComSoPac outlined the situation to Admiral Nimitz and promised to release all units required for future operations as soon as possible. In view of the circumstances, Admiral Nimitz concurred in the temporary transfer of troops for use at Emirau.

The target for the operation is an irregularly shaped island eight miles long, hilly and heavily wooded. It lies in the southeastern portion of the St. Matthias Group, about 25 miles from Massau, the other principal island. Situated 90 miles northwest of Kavieng, Emirau was considered suitable for development as a base for fighters, bombers, and torpedo boats. All intelligence indicated that the Japanese had not occupied the islands in any appreciable strength, and a photo reconnaissance mission flown by VD–1 on 16 March revealed no trace of enemy activity or installations. (See Map 34.)

Even though little opposition was expected, detailed provisions for strong air and naval gunfire support were a part of the Emirau operation plan. The naval bombardment group that was to have shelled Kavieng under the cancelled plan was ordered to hit the town and its airfields anyway as insurance against interference from the enemy. While it was anticipated that there would be no need for preliminary bombardment of Emirau before the landing, two destroyers of the escort were prepared to deliver call fire, and planes from two supporting escort carriers were to be overhead, ready to strafe and bomb as necessary. The cruisers and other destroyers of the escort would take station to screen the landing. Should a Japanese surface threat materialize, the 4 battleships and 15 destroyers pounding Kavieng on D-Day would be available as a weighty back-up power. On Green, planes of VMSB–243, VMTB–134, and VB–98 were on standby for possible employment, reinforcing the carrier planes.

The formidable support preparations for Emirau made the unopposed amphibious operation seem anticlimactic. The loading, movement, and landing of General Noble's force was conducted in an aura of orderly haste. New shipping assignments, necessitated by the change in plans, forced the 4th Marines to sort and redistribute all the supplies in its beach-side dumps during the night of 15 March. Loading began the next morning and continued through the 17th when the troops went on board ship, and Commodore Reifsnider's attack group sailed from Guadalcanal.

The ships left in two echelons, grouped by cruising speed and destined to rendezvous on D minus 1. The Marines of the two assault battalions, 1/4 and 2/4, were on board nine APDs; the remainder of the landing force traveled to the target on three LSDs and an APA. One LSD transported the 66 LVTs that would land the assault waves over Emirau's fringing reef, another carried three LCTs, two of them loaded with tanks, and the third had three

LCTs on board bearing radar and antiaircraft guns.

At 0605 on 20 March, the attack group arrived in the transport area, the LSD launched her LVTs, and the assault troops transferred to the tractors using the APDs' boats which were supplemented by those from the APA. Then, as the men of the reserve battalion, 3/4, scrambled down the nets into boats to be ready for employment wherever needed, Corsairs of VMF–218 flashed by overhead to make a last minute check of the island for signs of the Japanese. Right on schedule, the assault waves crossed the island's encircling reef and went ashore on two beaches about 1,000 yards apart near the eastern end of the island, while a detachment of 2/4 secured a small islet that sheltered the easternmost beach. Soon after the assault troops landed, the 3d Battalion's boats grounded on the reef, and the reserve waded ashore through knee-deep water. During these landings, a few shots were fired in return to supposed enemy opposition, but subsequent investigation showed that there were no Japanese on the island.

Had there been opposition, one hitch in the landing plan could have been fateful. The tanks were not launched in time for the assault, since their LSD's flooding mechanism was only partially operative. A fleet tug with the escort was able to drag the loaded LCTs out through the stern gate by means of a towline. Although by this time the success of landing was assured, the tanks were run ashore anyway both as insurance and for training.

Supplies began coming in about 1100, first from the APDs and then from the APA, with the LCTs helping the ships' boats to unload. By nightfall, 844 tons of bulk cargo had been landed in addition to the weapons and equipment that went ashore in the assault. All the ships sailed just after sunset, leaving General Noble's force of 3,727 men to hold the island and prepare for follow-up echelons.

Emirau's natives told the Marines that only a handful of Japanese had been on the island, and they had left about two months before the landing. Intelligence indicated that there were enemy fuel and ration dumps on Massau and a radio station on a nearby island. On 23 March, destroyers shelled the areas where the reported installations lay and, according to later native reports, succeeded in damaging the dumps and radio enough to cause the Japanese to finish the job and try to escape to Kavieng. On the 27th, a destroyer intercepted a large canoe carrying enemy troops about 40 miles south of Massau; the Japanese opened up with rifles and machine guns, and the ship's return fire destroyed them all. This episode furnished the last and only vestige of enemy resistance in the St. Matthias Group.

The first supply echelon reached Emirau on 25 March, bringing with it the men and equipment of a battalion of the 25th Naval Construction Regiment. The Seabees and the supplies landed over beaches and dumps that had been prepared by the 4th Marines. Five days later, three more naval construction battalions arrived to turn to on the air base and light naval facilities. An MTB squadron began patrolling on the 26th while its base was being readied. Sites for two 7,000-foot bomber strips and a field 5,000-feet-long for fighters were located and surveyed before the month's end. On 31 March, heavy construction on the airfields began.

In view of the island's projected role as an important air base, General Noble's relief as island commander was a naval avia-

tor, Major General James T. Moore, who had been Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, since 1 February. General Moore, with advance elements of the wing headquarters squadron, arrived on Emirau on 7 April, following by two days the forward echelon of MAG–12. Relief for the 4th Marines by the island's garrison, the 147th Infantry Regiment, took place on 11 April, and the Marines left on the same ships that brought the Army unit. At noon on the 12th, acting on Admiral Wilkinson's orders as operation commander, General Moore formally assumed command of all ground forces on Emirau.

Throughout April, airfield construction continued at a steady but rapid tempo in order to ready the island for full use in the interdiction of Japan's Bismarcks bases. The first emergency landing was made on the 14th when a Navy fighter came down on one of the bomber strips. On the 29th, SCAT transports began operating regularly from the new fields, and, on the 2d of May, the first squadron of the MAG–12 garrison, VMF–115, arrived and sent up its initial combat air patrol. In the next two weeks, several more Marine fighter, dive, and torpedo bomber squadrons moved up from Bougainville and Green. By mid-May, Emirau was an operating partner in the ring of SWPA and AirSols bases that throttled Rabaul and Kavieng.

THE MILK RUNS BEGIN [20]

The prime target at the hub of the encircling Allied airfields, Rabaul, had no respite from attack even while the SWPA forces were seizing the Admiralties and SoPac troops were securing Emirau. If anything, the aerial offensive against the enemy base intensified, since the absence of interceptors permitted both a systematic program of destruction and the employment of fighters as bombers.

First on the list of objectives to be eliminated was Rabaul proper. The town was divided into 14 target areas which, in turn, were further subdivided into two or three parts; each was methodically wiped out. Two weeks after the opening attack of 28 February, the center of the town was gutted, and most strikes, thereafter, were aimed at more widely spaced structures on the outskirts. By 20 April, only 122 of the 1,400 buildings that had once comprised Rabaul were still standing and these were "so scattered that it was no longer a paying proposition to try to make it a 100 percent job." [21]

Weeks before the AirSols staff reached this conclusion, the task of reducing the town to rubble and charred timbers was left pretty much to the fighter-bombers, while the B–24s, B–25s, SBDs, and TBFs concentrated on the two largest enemy supply dumps, one about two miles west of Rapopo and the other on the peninsula's north coast three miles west of Rabaul. Bomber pilots found that 500-

[20] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *SoPac ACI Repts;* Off of NavAirCIntel, ComSoPac, The Reduction of Rabaul, 19Feb–15May44, dtd 8Jun44, hereafter *Reduction of Rabaul;* ComAirNorSols WarD, 15–30Jun44, hereafter *ComAirNorSols WarD* with appropriate months; MASP Correspondence on Ops and TacEmpl of Units, 1943–44; *Thirteenth-AF Data;* AirSols Ftr-StrikeComd WarD, 15Mar–1Jun44, dtd 15Jul44; *1st MAW Mar–Jun44 WarDs; Eighth Area ArmyOps; SE Area NavAirOps—V;* Craven and Cate, *Guadalcanal to Saipan;* Ross, *RNZAF;* Sherrod, *MarAirHist.* USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul.*

[21] *Reduction of Rabaul,* p. 4.

pound bombs containing clusters of 128 smaller incendiary bombs were more effective than high explosive in laying waste to these sprawling areas of storage tents, sheds, and ammunition piles.

Over the course of three months, during which the major destruction of aboveground installations was accomplished, an average of 85 tons of bombs a day was dropped on Rabaul targets. The attack was a team effort, done in part by all the plane types assigned to AirSols command. The two Liberator groups of the Thirteenth Air Force provided a normal daily effort of 24 planes until 23 March, when all heavy bombers were diverted to attacks on Truk and other targets in the Carolines. The Thirteenth's B–25 group also sent up an average of 24 planes a day. The strength of Marine and Navy light bombers varied during the period, but generally there were three SBD and three TBF squadrons at Piva and three SBD and one TBF squadron at Green; in all about 160–170 planes were available, with a third to a half that number in daily use. Even when the Japanese attacked the Torokina perimeter in March, and much of the air support of the defending Army troops was furnished by Piva-based light bombers, there was little letup in the relentless attack on Rabaul. The SBD–TBF squadrons at Green increased their efforts, which were supplemented daily by the attacks of 48–60 fighters equipped to operate as bombers.

Once the Zekes disappeared from the sky over the Bismarcks, AirSols had a surplus of fighter planes. Consequently, all Army P–38s, P–39s, and P–40s, and RNZAF P–40s, were fitted with bomb racks, after which they began making regular bombing attacks. At first, the usual loading was one 500-pound bomb for the Airacobras, Warhawks, and Kittyhawks and two for the Lightnings, but before long, the single-engine planes were frequently carrying one half-ton bomb apiece and the P–38s, two. Except for some bombing trial runs by Corsairs against targets on New Ireland, AirSols, Navy and Marine fighters in this period confined their attacks on ground targets to strafing runs. Later in the year, all fighter aircraft habitually carried bombs.[22]

The pattern of attacks was truly "clock-round," giving the enemy no rest, with the nighttime segment of heckling raids dominated by Mitchells. Army B–25s drew the job at first, but with the entry into action of VMB–413 in mid-March, the task gradually was given over to Marine PBJs. The Marine squadron, the first of five equipped with Mitchells to serve in the South and Southwest Pacific, proved particularly adept at night operations as well as the more normal daylight raids. General Matheny, the veteran bomber commander, specially commended the unit for its development of "the dangerous, tiresome mission of night heckling against the enemy bases to the highest perfection it has attained in the fourteen months I have been working under ComAirSols." [23]

The object of the heckling missions was to have at least one plane over the target all night long. For the enemy troops below, the routine that was developed must

[22] Much of the pioneering work in perfecting the Corsair as a fighter-bomber was done by Marine squadrons operating against enemy islands in the Marshalls. Their story will be covered in the fourth volume of this series.

[23] Quoted in VMB–413 Hist, 1Mar43–1Jul45, dtd 15 Jul45, p. 5.

TOWN OF RABAUL *shows the effect of area saturation bombing in this photograph tcken from a Navy SBD during an attack on 22 March 1944. (USN 80–G–220342)*

CORSAIRS AT EMIRAU *in position along the taxiway to the new airfield which was operational less than two months after the landing. (USMC 81362)*

have been nerve-wracking. At dusk, the first PBJ:

> . . . appeared over Rabaul just as the Japanese began their evening meal. It dropped several bombs and retired. Minutes later, it came in again, hundreds of feet lower. More bombs dropped and it circled away. This pattern was repeated until, on its last run, the plane strafed the area.
>
> As the sound of its motor died away, the Japanese heard the second plane coming in on schedule to repeat the maddening process which went on night after night.[24]

The enemy troops that were subjected to the mass air raids of spring 1944 were surprisingly better off than aerial observers could tell. Spurred on by the punishing attacks which scored heavily against major targets, the Japanese dispersed a substantial portion of their supplies out of sight under cover of the jungle. Even more significant was the fact that every man not bedridden or wounded labored to dig caves and tunnels to shelter the troops and materiel needed to fight should the Rabaul area be invaded. By the end of May, enough supplies were underground to insure that the Japanese could make a prolonged defense. The digging-in process kept up until the end of the war, making Rabaul a fortress in fact as well as name.

The responsibility for the defense of the Rabaul area was a dual one, with Japanese Army and Navy troops holding separate sectors. The battered town and the mountainous peninsula east of it, from Praed Point to the northern cape, was defended by elements of the *Southeast Area Fleet.* Other naval troops, primarily antiaircraft artillery and air base units converted to infantry, held positions in the vicinity of Vunakanau and Tobera airfields. *Eighth Area Army* defended the rest of Gazelle Peninsula north of the Keravat and Warangoi Rivers. General Imamura, deeply imbued with the offensive spirit of Japanese military tradition, prepared battle plans which would meet an invasion attempt, wherever it occurred, with vigorous counterattacks. If all else failed, he felt that "the members of the whole army should commit the suicide attack." [25] Admiral Kusaka believed it was his primary duty to keep "his forces safe as long as possible and planned to hold on and destroy the enemy fighting strength" [26] by a tenacious defense of the elaborate fortifications the Navy had constructed in the hills back of Rabaul. Despite the difference in philosophy of ultimate employment, however, officers and men of both services worked together well, readying themselves to meet an attack that never came.

The growing desperation of the Japanese position in the Bismarcks was borne home to General Imamura by an order which the area army's assistant chief of staff characterized as "a cruel, heartless, unreasonable measure." [27] On 25 March, the units on New Guinea which had been under Imamura's command, the *Fourth Air* and *Eighteenth Armies*, were transferred by *Imperial General Headquarters* to the control of the *Second Area Army* defending western New Guinea. Since by this time the only contact the *Eighth Area Army* had with its erstwhile troops was by radio, the transfer was a practical move,

[24] John A. DeChant. *Devilbirds, The Story of United States Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), p. 140.

[25] *Eighth Area ArmyOps*, p. 191.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Entry of 15Mar44 in CinCPac–CinCPOA Item No. 11,955, Diary of MajGen Masatake Kimihara, 1Jan–9Jun44, in CinCPac–CinCPOA Translations No. 1, dtd 31Oct44.

however disheartening its effect may have been on the army staff at Rabaul. As if to soothe the sense of isolation and loss, Tokyo directed General Imamura to defend Rabaul as a foothold from which future offensive operations would be launched.

The emptiness of this promise of future Japanese offensives was emphasized by the changes Rabaul's impotence wrought in the dispositions of Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific. From the start of the New Georgia operation, most of the combat troops, planes, and ships assigned to Admiral Halsey's command had operated in the SWPA under General MacArthur's strategic direction. On the 25th of March, the JCS issued a directive that outlined a redisposition of forces to take effect on 15 June, by which the bulk of SoPac strength was assigned to MacArthur's operational control for the advance to the Philippines. CinCSWPA would get the Army's XIV Corps Headquarters and Corps Troops, plus six infantry divisions. Added to the Seventh Fleet were 3 cruisers, 27 destroyers, 30 submarines, 18 destroyer escorts, an amphibious command ship, an attack transport, an attack cargo ship, 5 APDs, 40 LSTs, and 60 LCIs. The Thirteenth Air Force was also to be transferred, but with instructions that its squadrons would support Pacific Ocean Areas' operations as required.

Marine ground forces in the South Pacific were assigned to Admiral Nimitz' command, as CinCPOA, to take part in the Central Pacific drive. The majority of Marine air units, however, were detailed to the SWPA as the core strength of the aerial blockade of bypassed enemy positions in the Solomons and Bismarcks.

Under the assignment of forces first worked out by JCS planners, the Royal New Zealand Air Force units, which had played such an important role in the Air-Sols campaign against Rabaul, were relegated to the SoPac garrison. This decision was unacceptable to the New Zealand Government which wanted its forces to continue their active role in the Pacific fighting. The end result of representations by the New Zealand Minister in Washington was the allocation of seven squadrons—four fighter, two medium bomber, and one flying boat—to the SWPA and seven squadrons of the same types to the South Pacific. Since, by this time in 1944, all RNZAF units were either equipped or in the process of being equipped with U.S. Navy planes, an overriding factor in squadron assignment was the ease of maintenance and resupply in areas that would be manned primarily by U.S. Navy and Marine units. Under the plans developed, the deployment of the RNZAF to assigned SWPA bases, Bougainville, Los Negros, Emirau, and Green, would not be completed until late in the year.

Many of the units that officially became part of General MacArthur's command in June were already under his operational control two months earlier. By mid-April, the 13th Air Task Group, comprising heavy bombers of the Thirteenth Air Force under Major General St. Clair Street, was operating against the Palaus and Carolines to protect the flank of the Hollandia task forces. One heavy bombardment group of Street's command moved from Munda and Guadalcanal to Momote field on Los Negros on 20 April. The other group of the Thirteenth's B–24s followed soon after, and both bombed en-

emy bases that threatened MacArthur's further moves up the New Guinea coast and Nimitz' thrust into the Marianas.

Since he was to have a second American air force operating under his headquarters, General Kenney recommended and had approved the formation of a new command, Far East Air Forces (FEAF), whose principal components would be the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces. In addition to heading FEAF, Kenney remained Commanding General, Allied Air Forces, and, as such, commanded all other air units assigned to the Southwest Pacific Area, including those that had been a part of AirSols.

On 15 June 1944, all military responsibility for the area and the Allied units west of 159° East Longitude and south of the Equator passed to General MacArthur. Coincident with this change, Admiral Halsey relinquished his command of the South Pacific Area to his deputy of eight months standing, Vice Admiral John H. Newton, and went to sea as Commander, Third Fleet. The AirSols units became part of a new organization, Aircraft, Northern Solomons, with an initial strength of 40 flying squadrons, 23 of them Marine. The seven Thirteenth Air Force squadrons that were included in AirNorSols were under orders to join FEAF, and eight of the Navy's and RNZAF's were headed for SoPac garrison duty. [28]

Reflecting the preponderance of Marine elements assigned to AirNorSols was the appointment of General Mitchell as its commander. Mitchell, who had turned over leadership of AirSols to the Army Air Forces' Major General Hubert R. Harmon on 15 March,[29] had shortly thereafter relieved Admiral Fitch as ComAirSoPac. Throughout this period, the Marine general continued to head MASP also, but with his assumption of duties as ComAirNorSols, he designated Brigadier General Claude A. Larkin to succeed him in the South Pacific command and preside over its dissolution. According to plans for the future employment of its component wings, the 1st in the Southwest and the 2d in the Central Pacific, there was no longer any need for MASP. Completing the picture of Marine air command changes, General Mitchell took over the 1st Wing at the same time he became ComAirNorSols and established the headquarters of both organizations on Bougainville.

The command reorganization of 15 June 1944 marked the end of an important phase of the Pacific fighting, one which saw the onetime scene of violent battle action gradually become a staging and training center for combat on other fronts. In fitting tribute to the men who drove the Japanese back from the Solomons and Bismarcks, Admiral Halsey sent a characteristic farewell message to all ships and bases when he departed Noumea, saying: "'Well done' to my victorious all-services South Pacific fighting team. You have met, measured, and mowed down the best the enemy had on land and sea and in the air." [30]

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[28] ComAirNorSols OPlan No. 1, dtd 6Jun44, Anx A, EstDistr of Air Units, ComAirNorSols.

[29] Two other Marine officers served briefly as ComAirSols. Brigadier General Field Harris, who relieved General Harmon on 20 April, and Major General James T. Moore, who relieved General Harris on 31 May. *StrikeComd WarD*, 15Mar–15Jun44.

[30] Entry of 15Jun44 in *ComAirNorSols Jun44 WarD*.

THE MITCHELLS REMAIN [31]

Controlling most of the strikes against Japanese targets when AirNorSols was activated was Fighter-Strike Command, headed by Colonel Frank H. Schwable. The title of this headquarters, the successor to AirSols Strike Command, reflected the shift in emphasis of fighter missions from air combat to strafing and bombing in company with SBDs and TBFs. The life of the new command was short, however, for General Mitchell abolished all separate type commands on 21 August when he centralized direction of tactical air operations under his own headquarters with Colonel Schwable as operations officer. Responsibility for controlling the aircraft assigned to various missions at each AirNorSols base remained with the area air commander who was also, in most cases, a Marine air group commander. Marines of the group headquarters doubled as members of the air commander's staff, serving together with representatives of other Allied and American units flying from the particular base.

Logistic support of the AirNorSols squadrons, except for those in the Admiralties, was to be the responsibility of ComSoPac until December when agencies of the Seventh Fleet could take over. For Mitchell's Marine units this function, once channeled through MASP, was made the responsibiltiy of Marine Air Depot Squadron 1, which remained in the South Pacific to handle the 1st Wing's personnel and supply needs. A similar role as a rear echelon for 2d Wing units staging to Central Pacific bases was performed by MAG-11's service squadron. All men and equipment that had been part of MASP were distributed to other units or returned to the States. General Larkin, who decommissioned MASP on 31 July, wrote its informal but apt epitaph in a letter to General Rowell at MAWPac:

> Certainly hate to see this command go under but it has outlived its usefulness, and it is always good news when units can be done away with rather than having to form new ones. At least it is an indication that we are doing okay with the war in this area by reducing and going forward.[32]

The inevitable result of the continuous Allied advance was that fields that had once bustled with combat air activity—at Noumea, Efate, Espiritu Santo, Guadalcanal, Banika, and Munda—were relegated to limited use or closed down. Newer, fully developed bases like Green and Emirau carried the burden of the attack against Rabaul and Kavieng, while most of the strikes aimed at the thousands of Japanese troops still active in the northern Solomons were mounted from the Piva fields. The more profitable enemy targets, however, those that could be reached only by heavy bombers and the few short-range planes that could crowd onto advanced airstrips, were hit less frequently than the bypassed positions. In July, as an example, SWPA land-based air forces flew over

[31] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *ComAirNorSols Jun–Dec44 WarDs; 1st MAW Jun44–Aug45 WarDs;* ComAirEmirau WarDs, Jan–Aug45; MAG-61 WarDs, Jul–Aug45; *Eighth Area ArmyOps;* Maj Charles W. Boggs, Jr., *Marine Aviation in the Philippines* (Washington: HistDiv, HQMC, 1951); Odgers, *RAAF Against Japan*; Ross, *RNZAF*; Sherrod, *MarAirHist*; USSBS, *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul.*

[32] BGen Claude A. Larkin ltr to MajGen Ross E. Rowell, dtd 31Jul44, in MASP correspondence folder on Formation, Organization, and Disbandment. General Larkin, on 4 August, became Deputy Commander, AirNorSols.

8,000 sorties against targets in bypassed areas but only 3,000 against targets in the forward areas.[33] There was a constant danger that bombing attacks against blockaded enemy forces would degenerate into what ComAirPac called "mere weight lifting,"[34] an ineffective use of the air weapon, which was perhaps the most powerful available to Allied commanders.

General Kenney was well aware of the fact that some of his most effective aviation units, the veteran Marine squadrons, were tied down in the Solomons and Bismarcks. He intended to employ them in the seizure of Mindanao, and, to make the Marine units available, he determined to replace them with RNZAF and RAAF squadrons. In like manner, General MacArthur planned to relieve the American infantry divisions on Bougainville and New Britain with Australian troops. There was a strong current of opinion at MacArthur's headquarters that further operations in British and Australian territories and mandates should be undertaken by Commonwealth forces. On 12 July, CinCSWPA confirmed this concept in a letter to the Australian commander, General Blamey, stating:

> A redistribution of Allied forces in the SWPA is necessitated by the advance to the Philippine Islands. Exclusive of the Admiralties, it is desired that Australian forces assume the responsibility for the continued neutralization of the enemy in the Australian and British territory and mandates in the SWPA by the following dates:
>
> Northern Solomons-Green Island-Emirau—1 Oct 44
>
> Australian New Guinea—1 Nov. 44
>
> New Britain—1 Nov 44[35]

[33] *ComAirPac Jul44 Analysis*, p. 11.

[34] *ComAirPac Mar44 Analysis*, p. 19.

[35] Quoted in Odgers, *RAAF Against Japan*, p. 292.

General Blamey ordered the Australian II Corps to relieve the American XIV Corps on Bougainville, the 40th Infantry Division on New Britain, and the garrisons on Emirau, Green, Stirling, and New Georgia. The 6th Australian Division was designated to replace the American XI Corps in eastern New Guinea. Not content with holding defensive perimeters, the Australians intended to seek out and destroy the Japanese wherever this would be done without jeopardizing Allied positions.

Since the Australians planned an active campaign with a limited number of troops—two brigades on New Britain and four on Bougainville—plentiful and effective close air support was a necessity. Some of it would be provided by RAAF reconnaissance and direct support aircraft operating under control of Australian ground force commanders, but most of the planes would come from ComAirNorSols. According to plans, a New Zealand Air Task Force under Group Captain Geoffrey N. Roberts, was to take over control of air operations from AirNorSols when the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing moved to the Philippines.

One big hitch in this plan for RNZAF replacement of the 1st Wing occurred when the first target in the American return to the Philippines was shifted northward from Mindanao to Leyte. This change cancelled the wing's prospective employment, for, as General Kenney later explained: ". . . the movement forward of any air units in the Southwest Pacific depended upon the location of the unit under consideration, the availability of shipping, and the availability of air-

dromes in the forward zone." [36] In the perennially tight shipping situation, the distance of the wing from the Philippines acted against its employment as a unit. As a consequence, the changeover date from AirNorSols to RNZAF command, originally projected for 1 November 1944, was repeatedly delayed and did not take place until 15 July 1945. In the interim, the 1st Wing's operational strength was pared down to its transport and medium bomber groups; all fighter and dive bomber squadrons were transferred piecemeal to the Philippines. [37]

About 20 September, wing headquarters received the first word that its seven dive bomber squadrons would be employed in the Luzon campaign. For the most effective combat control, it was decided to employ two air groups, one of four squadrons and the other of three, and on 1 October, by transfers and joinings, MAG–24 became an all-SBD outfit (VMSB–133, –236, –241, and –341). A new Headquarters, MAG–32, was sent out from Hawaii to command the wing's remaining Dauntless squadrons (VMSB–142, –224, and –243). Air intelligence officers with experience in close air support techniques as practiced in the Marshalls and Marianas reported from the Central Pacific to assist in training the SBD crews. General Mitchell issued a training directive which indicated that the dive bombers would "be employed almost exclusively as close support for Army ground forces in an advancing situation" and that their basic mission would "be largely confined to clearing obstacles immediately in front of friendly troops." [38] Army units worked closely with the Marine squadrons during the training to formulate realistic problems of troop support. Whenever Japanese antiaircraft concentrations were light, the SBD pilots practiced their air support techniques during the regular routine of strikes on enemy targets.

The monotonous pattern of attacks on the same targets, day after day, went on regardless of the pending deployment of various wing units. One virtue of the situation was that many Marine pilots and aircrewmen got their first taste of combat flying during these months of strikes against bypassed objectives. Once, whole squadrons had been sent back to the States after completing a combat tour, but now, only the individual veterans returned and the squadrons remained, kept up to strength by replacements. The flying, gunnery, and bombing experience gained while hitting Rabaul and Kavieng and tackling the Japanese positions in the northern Solomons was invaluable. Although combat and operational casualties were low, there was enough opposition from enemy gunners, enough danger from the treacherous weather, to make pilots handle any AirNorSols mission with prudence. The urge for more violent action was always present, however, and the flyers were cautioned repeatedly in orders against "jousting with A/A [antiaircraft] positions in any area at any time." [39]

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[36] Gen George C. Kenney ltr to Maj Charles W. Boggs, Jr., dtd 27Oct50, quoted in Boggs, *Marine Aviation, op. cit.*, p. 8.

[37] By the end of August 1944, all torpedo bomber squadrons in the 1st Wing had been transferred to the States or to other wings for employment in the Central Pacific.

[38] ComAirNorSols TrngMemo No. 1, dtd 21Oct44, in *ComAirNor Sols Oct44 WarD.*

[39] ComAirSols OpMemo No. 37, dtd 5Apr44, Subj: Regs on Bombing and Strafing, in *StrikeComd WarDs;* ComAirNorSols OpInstrn No. 13–44, dtd 12Aug44, Subj: Bombing and Strafing Regs, in *ComAirNorSols Aug44 WarD.*

About the only variety that flyers had in what the 1st Wing's history called a "deadly routine of combat air patrol, milk run bombing, and night heckling" was experimenting with new weapons and techniques.[40] Incendiaries of different types were tested against Japanese installations, and bomb loadings were varied to measure destructive effect. This diversity brought no letup in the weight of the attack delivered against major enemy objectives until the end of the summer when, as the air operations commander at Piva noted, "practically all of the good targets in these areas had been destroyed." [41] As the Japanese went underground to find cover in the faceless jungle, the number of obvious targets steadily lessened, and many AirNorSols strikes blasted and burned area targets in a systematic destruction pattern much like that which leveled the town of Rabaul. Even the gardens that the Japanese troops planted to supplement their rations were sprayed with oil in hope that the crops would wither and die.

During September and October, one spectacular new air weapon, a drone bomb, was tested against Japanese targets in the AirNorSols area. The drones, specially built planes capable of carrying a 2,000-pound bomb, were radio controlled by torpedo bombers of a special naval test unit. Synchronized television screens in drone and control planes enabled the controllers to view what was ahead of the drones and to crash them against point targets. After test attacks on a ship hulk beached at Guadalcanal, the test unit moved up to Stirling and Green and made 47 sorties in conjunction with F4Us, SBDs, and PBJs. The results were inconclusive. Two of the pilotless bombs were lost en route to targets because of radio interference, mechanical defects caused five crashes, Japanese antiaircraft shot down three, and five drones had television failures and could not locate a target. Of those drones that did attack, 18 hit their objective and 11 missed or near missed. ComAirNorSols concluded that there was a future for this weapon, but that it needed more development work and better aircraft for drones. Evidently, the Chief of Naval Operations, who in August had turned down a request to use SBDs as drones, agreed with General Mitchell's evaluation. Since the "better aircraft" were needed elsewhere, the test unit was decommissioned shortly after completing its last strike on 26 October.[42]

Vastly more effective than the imaginative drone bombs were the attacks by more workaday aircraft. The Corsairs, in particular, expanded their usefulness through regular bombing missions, since there was little call for them in their role as interceptors. It was this aspect of the Corsairs' capabilities, however, that brought about their employment in the Philippines.

Fighter planes were badly needed at Leyte where Third Fleet carriers had stayed a month beyond the time of their scheduled departure for a strike on Japan in order to fly cover for amphibious shipping. Two of the Seventh Fleet's escort carriers had been lost in the Battle of Leyte Gulf and four more had been dam-

[40] 1st MAW Hist Jul41–Jun46, n.d., p. 13.

[41] ComAirPiva WarD, 15Jun–30Nov44, p. 21.

[42] STAG One Rept of SvcTest on Drones Attacking Beached Hulk on Cape Esperence, GuadalcanalIs, dtd 6Aug44; ComAirNorSols Rept on Ops of STAG One Det in NorSols Area, dtd 30Oct44.

aged, so that Admiral Kinkaid was desperately short of planes for air defense. Fifth Air Force P–38s, based at a muddy, inadequate forward airstrip at Tacloban, had their hands full defending the immediate beachhead area and could do little to augment the shipping protection afforded by carrier aircraft. Greatly increasing the seriousness of the air picture was the advent of the *kamikazes*, the Japanese suicide pilots who crashed their bomb-laden planes against shipping targets.

Admiral Halsey, who was anxious to free his carriers for the attack on the Japanese home islands, saw a solution to his problem in the Marine Corsairs of the 1st Wing. He reminded General MacArthur that these fighters were available and had proved themselves repeatedly when they flew under Halsey's command.[43] They were capable of reinforcing the Army Air Forces' planes in interceptor and ground support roles and would be a welcome addition to the air cover of the Seventh Fleet's ships. Deciding quickly to employ the Marine planes, MacArthur ordered them brought forward. On 30 November, General Mitchell received a directive from Allied Air Forces to transfer four of the 1st Wing's Corsair squadrons to operational control of the Fifth Air Force on Leyte. The planes were to arrive at Tacloban by 3 December.

As soon as the order was received, MAG–12 (VMF–115, –211, –218, and –313) was alerted for the move and ceased all combat operations under ComAirNorSols. With Marine PBJs as navigational escorts, the flight echelons of group headquarters and the fighter squadrons arrived in the Philippines on schedule, after covering 1,957 miles from Emirau via Hollandia and Peleliu. A shuttle service by R4Ds of MAG–25, supplemented by C–47s of the Fifth Air Force, carried essential maintenance men and material forward to insure that the Corsairs kept flying. On 5 December, MAG–12 pilots flew their initial combat patrols in the Philippines and shot down the first of a long string of enemy planes.[44]

On 7 December, a week after the first Marine fighters were ordered to Leyte, MAG–14 and the remaining four Corsair squadrons in the 1st Wing were put on 48-hours notice for a forward movement. This time the destination was an airfield yet to be built on Samar, and the move was not so precipitate as that of MAG–12. The first squadron of MAG–14 to fly in from Green, VMO–251,[45] arrived on Samar on 2 January. The forward echelons of the group headquarters and service squadrons, and of VMF–212, –222, and –223, had arrived by 24 January. Again PBJs guided and escorted the Corsairs and, stripped of most of their guns and extra weight, helped transport key personnel and priority equipment from Green

[43] Halsey and Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 231.

[44] The honor of shooting down the first enemy plane in the Philippines credited to a Marine went to a pilot of VMF(N)–541, who bagged an Oscar before dawn on the 5th. The squadron, equipped with a night fighter version of the F6F, had arrived at Tacloban on 3 December, exchanging places with an Army P–61 night fighter squadron. MacArthur had asked Nimitz for the temporary loan of the faster Hellcats to improve dawn and dusk interception at Leyte. CinCSWPA disp to CinCPOA, dtd 26Nov44, quoted in Sherrod, *MarAirHist*, p. 275.

[45] VMO–251, originally an observation squadron, was re-equipped as a fighter squadron in the summer of 1942, but was not redesignated VMF–251 until 31 January 1945.

LEYTE INVASION FLEET *assembled in Seeadler Harbor in the Admiralties symbolizes the move forward from the Solomons and Bismarcks.* (*SC 283167*)

MARINE MITCHELLS *fly over Crater Peninsula during one of the ceaseless round of suppressive attacks that neutralized Rabaul.* (*USMC 114743*)

and Piva in addition. Marine and Army transports planes carried the bulk of the men and gear of the forward echelon.

The ground echelons of the Marine fighter groups were not able to begin moving to the Philippines until February when shipping priorities eased after the Luzon landings. In contrast, a good part of the ground echelons of MAG–24 and –32 squadrons preceded their planes to Luzon and helped establish a field at Mangaldan near Lingayen Gulf. Flights of SBDs began arriving from the Bismarcks on 25 January, and, by the end of the month, all seven Dauntless squadrons were operational.[46]

The withdrawal of Marine fighters and dive bombers from operational control of ComAirNorSols placed the burden of maintaining the aerial blockade of the bypassed Japanese on RNZAF Corsairs and Venturas and MAG–61's Mitchells. The New Zealanders smoothly took on all fighter-bomber commitments that the Marines had handled; there was no break in the unremitting pattern of harassing attacks and watchdog patrols. RNZAF Corsairs also flew close and direct support strikes for the Australian infantrymen on Bougainville, working closely with the RAAF tactical reconnaissance aircraft attached to the II Corps. The Mitchells and Venturas also flew ground support missions for the Australians, but spent most of their time making bombing attacks on Rabaul, Kavieng, and the other principal Japanese bases.

The Venturas, which were not fitted with a bombsight suitable for medium-level (9,500–13,000 feet) drops until April 1945, relied on Marine PBJs as strike leaders in this type of mission. When the Mitchell released its bombs, the accompanying RNZAF bombers dropped theirs also. The resulting concentration of hits was particularly effective against the larger targets found at Rabaul, where most of the medium-level bombing was done. Low-level attacks by both the Mitchell and Ventura squadrons were aimed primarily at targets that were not so well protected by antiaircraft as those at Rabaul.

Only one squadron of MAG–61's Mitchells was freed from the frustrating round of policing missions in the Bismarcks and Solomons. On 3 March, on orders from Allied Air Forces, VMB–611 was transferred to MAG–32 with orders to move forward from Emirau to the Philippines. By the end of the month, 611's PBJs were operating from fields on Mindanao. The four bombing squadrons remaining in MAG–61, VMB–413, –423, –433, and –443, served the last months of the war at Emirau and Green. Orders to deploy to the Philippines were finally received just prior to the end of the fighting.

As if to signify the near completion of the aerial campaign that had begun at Guadalcanal almost three years before, General Mitchell relinquished command of AirNorSols and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing on 3 June 1945 and returned to the States two days later. A little over a month after the general's departure, the long-awaited transfer of control of air operations to the RNZAF finally took place. On 15 July, Air Commodore Roberts assumed command from Marine Brigadier General Lewie G. Merritt and AirNorSols was dissolved. General Merritt's 1st Wing now came under the

[46] The story of Marine participation in the Philippines liberation campaign will be covered in the fourth volume of this series.

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orders of the New Zealand Air Task Force.[47]

By the time Air Commodore Roberts took over the direction of air operations, the primary mission of most combat aircraft in his command was support of the Australian ground forces of II Corps. On Bougainville, in a nine-months-long offensive, the Australians had pushed the Japanese back in all directions from the Torokina perimeter and were driving on the enemy positions at Buin, Numa-Numa, and Bonis. On New Britain, the Australians, operating from a base camp at Jacquinot Bay on the southern coast, kept aggressive patrols forward in the Open Bay-Wide Bay region of Gazelle Peninsula, sealing off the Japanese at Rabaul from the rest of the island. In March, when an airfield was opened at Jacquinot, RAAF planes and, later, RNZAF Corsairs and Venturas, flew ground support missions and attacked the enemy at Rabaul. (See Map 31.)

On 3 August, General Kenney directed General Merritt to move the headquarters of the 1st Wing and MAG–61 to the Philippines. Six days later, Marine planes flew their last bombing mission against Rabaul. Six PBJs from VMB–413, six from VMB–423, five from VMB–443, and one from group headquarters took part; an RNZAF Catalina went along as rescue Dumbo. Each Mitchell carried eight 250-pound bombs which were dropped through heavy cloud cover with unobserved results; the targets were storage and bivouac areas near Rabaul and Vunakanau.

When the fighting ended on 14 August, some Mitchells had already flown to the Philippines, the remainder made the trip by the 19th. The wing's command post shifted from Bougainville to Zamboanga on Mindanao on 15 August. Ahead of the Marine squadrons lay months of hectic peacetime employment in North China as part of the American occupation forces. Behind the flyers and ground crews was a solid, lasting record of achievement in every task of aerial combat and blockade that had been asked of them.

[47] General Mitchell's relief had been Major General Louis E. Woods, but Woods held command only one day before he was ordered to Okinawa to take over Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army. General Merritt took command of AirNorSols and the 1st Wing on 10 June.

Appraisal

EPILOGUE[1]

Until the Japanese Emperor issued his rescript directing his forces to lay down their arms, troops of the *Eighth Area Army* and *Southeast Area Fleet* were still full of fight. On Bougainville, they were locked in desperate struggle with units of the Australian II Corps; on New Britain and New Ireland they were ready for battle but frustrated by lack of an opponent. Had the Allied seizure of Rabaul been necessary, the operation certainly would have been a bloody one.

Despite the steady pounding that Allied aircraft gave the enemy base—20,967 tons of bombs dropped in 29,354 sorties (over half of them flown by Marine planes)[2]—the Japanese had plenty of guns left with which to fight. According to postwar interrogations of officers of the garrison, only 93 out of a total of 367 antiaircraft guns were destroyed, 1 of 43 coast defense guns, and none of the thousands of infantry supporting weapons, ranging in size from light machine guns to 150mm howitzers. Since ground and beach defenses were seldom subjected to air attack, the high survival rate of the guns is not unusual. Even if they had been primary targets, however, many would have escaped destruction in the jungle or the caves where they were hidden.

By the war's end, the Japanese had built or improved more than 350 miles of tunnels and caves, where they had stored all their essential supplies and equipment. These stocks were sufficient to support the garrison well beyond the time when it surrendered. Ironically, it was the efficiency of the Allied naval and air blockade that was responsible for the favorable enemy logistic situation. In large part, Rabaul's troops subsisted on rations, dressed in uniforms, and used equipment that had been intended for garrisons cut off in the northern Solomons and eastern New Guinea.

Wherever supplies were short, the Japanese improvised. Issue rations were supplemented by extensive gardens, devoted primarily to cassava and sweet potato plants. Factories were set up which turned out black powder and sulfuric acid for explosives, manufactured flame throwers and mortars, and fabricated enough antitank mines to arm each man with one. Over 30,000 bombs were fused and planted as antipersonnel mines. The Japanese at Rabaul were prepared to do battle, and many of them, after 18 months of constant aerial attacks, were even anxious to meet

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from: *Eighth Area ArmyOps;* Hattori, *Complete War History;* USSBS, *Campaign Against Rabaul.*

[2] Of this total, U.S. Army Air Forces planes dropped 11,037 tons in 7,490 sorties; U.S. Navy planes, 1,458 in 4,608; British Commonwealth planes, 947 in 2,538; and U.S. Marine Corps planes, 7,142 in 14,718. Table No. 1 in USSBS, *Campaign Against Rabaul,* p. 263.

an opponent that they could come to grips with.

Fortunately, the encounter never took place. The Allied casualty list of an amphibious assault at Rabaul would have been as lengthy and grim as any of the Pacific War. When the order came for the Japanese to cease fighting, *Eighth Area Army* had about 57,000 men and *Southeast Area Fleet* about 34,000 on Gazelle Peninsula, with an additional 7,700 Army and 5,000 Navy troops a night's barge trip away on New Ireland.[3] These men, as part of the amazing display of national discipline evident throughout the Pacific, accepted the Emperor's surrender order without incident.

On 6 September 1945, General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka boarded HMS *Glory*, standing off Rabaul, and surrendered the forces of the *Eighth Area Army* and the *Southeast Area Fleet* to General Vernon A. H. Sturdee, commanding the Australian First Army. Two days later, at Torokina, the Japanese who had fought so tenaciously on Bougainville formally capitulated to the Australian II Corps' commander, Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Savige. At each ceremony, Air Commodore Roberts, RNZAF, was present as New Zealand's senior representative.[4] In a larger sense, he represented also his predecessors, ComAirNorSols and Com AirSols, and the thousands of Allied flyers who had a part in neutralizing Rabaul's offensive power.

[3] Strength figures for the Japanese garrison at the time of its surrender vary considerably because some sources include Korean labor troops and civilians attached to the military, while others omit them wholly or in part. A postwar compilation, issued in June 1950, by the Japanese Demobilization Bureau, arrived at these figures for Japanese only: Bismarcks—57,530 Army, 30,854 Navy; Solomons—12,330 Army, 16,729 Navy; Eastern New Guinea—12,100 Army, 1,200 Navy. Cited in Hattori, *Complete War History*, IV, p. 464.

[4] Ross, *RNZAF*, p. 311.

SUMMARY

At times in the first eight months of the war, it appeared that the tidal wave of Japanese expansion would never ebb. Yet, like its natural counterpart, the enemy wave washed to a halt, and then receded. Guadalcanal and Papua were the Japanese high water marks in the southern Pacific.

The naval battles off Guadalcanal, virtually a standoff as far as ships' losses were concerned, hurt the Japanese far more than the Allies. Confronted by ample evidence of America's superior productive capacity, the enemy could ill afford to trade ship for ship. Once the Cactus Air Force won control of the skies of the southern Solomons from the Zekes, the Japanese realized they faced unacceptable shipping losses if they continued the fight for Guadalcanal. The resulting evacuation of enemy troops from the key island foreshadowed other retreats and defeats certain to come.

Less than a month after the threat posed by the planes at Henderson Field forced the Japanese to pull out of Guadalcanal, a smashing victory won by land-based Allied aircraft crippled enemy efforts to hold positions on the opposite flank of the Solomon Sea. The heavy transport losses in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea ended large-scale reinforcement of the *Eighteenth Army* fighting in northeast New Guinea. Although the Japanese fought just as hard as before to hold what they had, they fought with fewer men, fewer weapons, and less food and supplies.

When the successful capture and defense of Guadalcanal and the simultaneous seizure of the Buna-Gona area of New Guinea wrote "finish" to the Japanese advance, the stage was set for a coordinated Allied offensive aimed at the enemy strategic citadel, Rabaul. General MacArthur's ELKTON plans, as revised in Washington in the light of forces available to the South and Southwest Pacific, formed the basis for the JCS CARTWHEEL directive of 28 March 1943. Under its provisions, a series of intermediate objectives were to be taken before the culminating assault on Rabaul. The common determinant for the selection of these objectives was their utility as air bases.

The seizure of the Russell Islands by Admiral Halsey's forces on 21 February, though not a part of the ELKTON concept, was, in spirit at least, the opening move of the drive on Rabaul. The airdrome that was constructed on Banika housed fighters and medium bombers which supported CARTWHEEL operations in the central and northern Solomons. The advance to the boundary of the South Pacific Area was characteristic of Admiral Halsey's infectious determination to maintain the initiative over the Japanese. He was equally anxious to get on with his first operation under CARTWHEEL, the seizure of New Georgia, but had to agree to several delays of D-Day in order to coordinate his attacks with those of Southwest Pacific forces. The joint landing date finally agreed upon was 30 June; the simultaneous targets were the Trobriands, New Georgia, and Nassau Bay near Salamaua on New Guinea.

The Japanese threat to Segi brought Marines to New Georgia nine days ahead of schedule, and the lack of enemy opposition enabled Army shore parties to land on Woodlark and Kiriwina a week before the garrison arrived. Otherwise, the main landings went ahead as planned. Four months of determined fighting were necessary before the successive Allied objectives on New Guinea, Salamaua, the Markham Valley, and Lae were captured. In the smaller compass of the New Georgia Group, the defeat of the Japanese took equally as long.

New Georgia was far from the best-managed or best-fought campaign of the Pacific War. It was, however, a time of learning for the Allied leaders and men involved, even though the learning process was prolonged and painful. The troops that finally broke out of the jungle to take Munda airfield were combat-wise, and their commanders had learned to make more realistic estimates of the time and men necessary to root the Japanese out of heavily defended objectives. Once Munda was in Allied hands, the enemy situation deteriorated. The rest of the island group was taken with increasing skill and spirit, with each assault demonstrating a greater familiarity with the tools and techniques of amphibious operations and the demands of jungle warfare. The Japanese finally gave way before the persistent pressure and evacuated their surviving forces from Kolombangara to fight again another day.

By the end of a summer of fighting marked by a gradual increase in Allied strength, it was apparent that the outer perimeter of Japanese island defenses soon would collapse. On 30 September, *Imperial General Headquarters* ordered the commanders of these vulnerable positions to do their utmost to hold out as long as possible. Time was needed for the construction of a cordon of defenses along a line arcing from the Marianas through the Palaus and western New Guinea to the

Philippines. General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka responded to the directive, which, in effect, conceded the eventual loss of Rabaul, by reinforcing Army and Navy garrisons in the northern Solomons, the Bismarcks, and eastern New Guinea. Both enemy commanders retained a large portion of their troops and materiel on New Britain and New Ireland, however, in the belief that a showdown battle for possession of Rabaul was inevitable.

The conviction of the Japanese leaders, that Rabaul would have to be taken, was shared in Brisbane, but not so freely accepted in Noumea, Pearl Harbor, or Washington. What ComSoPac, CinCPac, and JCS planners envisioned instead was the possibility that Rabaul could be bypassed and its strength neutralized by an aerial blockade mounted from bases within fighter range. Although General MacArthur opposed this concept, it won acceptance from the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the Quebec Conference in August and became a part of Allied strategy. The large number of troops, ships, and planes that would have been necessary to capture Rabaul were allotted instead to other operations of the two-pronged drive on Japan. To ensure the isolation of the enemy fortress, Kavieng and the Admiralties were designated as targets for SWPA forces in addition to the remaining CARTWHEEL objectives in eastern New Guinea, western New Britain, and southern Bougainville.

In the fall of 1943, Australian and American forces steadily drove the Japanese back from coastal and inland positions on the Huon Peninsula. The Allied goal was the seizure and security of airfields from which planes could support operations on both sides of Vitiaz Strait. Once Nadzab and Finschhafen were operational, air superiority over the strait and adjacent areas was assured.

The SoPac operation parallel to that on the Huon Peninsula entailed the seizure of a foothold on Bougainville. While the Marine parachutists' diversionary raid on Choiseul and the New Zealanders' capture of the Treasurys were part of the overall campaign, the main event was the IMAC landing at Cape Torokina on 1 November. By shunning the areas where the Japanese were concentrated, and hitting instead a lightly defended objective that required extensive base development, Admiral Halsey drastically reduced his assault casualty lists and avoided the prolonged battle to seize a major fortified position that had characterized the New Georgia operation.

The Japanese, recognizing the grave threat to Rabaul, reacted violently and swiftly to the Bougainville landing. AirSols and carrier planes, Third Fleet ships, and the dogged fighting of Marines and soldiers holding the beachhead beat back all attacks. Within the protection of the perimeter, Seabees and engineers overcame formidable natural obstacles to construct Torokina and Piva airfields and make them ready for their essential role in the reduction of Rabaul. By mid-December, ComAirSols was able to launch a sustained aerial attack designed to wipe out every vestige of the enemy's offensive power.

By design, the start of the massive AirSols assault on Rabaul coincided with the opening phase of the last CARTWHEEL operation, the seizure of western New Britain. One of the enigmas of the ensuing campaign was that the Japanese paid an inordinate amount of attention to the preliminary landing at Arawe, al-

though they were well aware of its limited strategic value. The tiny peninsula seemed to have a special attraction for pilots of the *Eleventh Air Fleet*, even after the 1st Marine Division's landings at Cape Gloucester made the Allied main objective obvious. The Japanese never had a chance to mount any telling air attacks on the new beachheads, however. They were too busy trying to defend Rabaul.

On 2 January 1944, three days after the Marines at Cape Gloucester seized their airdrome objective, other SWPA forces sailed through Vitiaz Strait, now secure on both shores, and landed at Saidor. The seizure of an enemy position on the New Guinea coast west of the Huon Peninsula was a giant stride forward on the way to the Philippines. Before the next scheduled amphibious operation was launched, the strategic situation was changed drastically by the evacuation of Japanese aircraft from Rabaul.

Credit for forcing the enemy withdrawal belongs to many Allied commands, but to none in so large a measure as to Aircraft, Solomons. The American and New Zealand pilots, aircrewmen, and ground personnel who fought as part of AirSols the long way up the Solomons chain made Rabaul a yawning grave for Japanese naval aviation. The final two months of incessant attacks, made possible by possession of the Bougainville airfields, disintegrated the defending air fleet. Although the order to pull out was precipitated by the devastating American carrier raid on Truk, the end of Japanese air operations at Rabaul was already certain.

The seizure of the Green Islands, just before the *Combined Fleet* ordered all serviceable aircraft withdrawn from New Britain, emphasized the steady worsening of the Japanese situation. Only a feeble attempt was made to punish an Allied amphibious force making a landing within easy range of any plane based at Rabaul. Once fields at Green were operational, it was inevitable that fighters and light bombers based there would own the skies over Gazelle Peninsula and southern New Ireland. Possession of Green also meant that ComAirSols could begin a systematic program of attacks on Kavieng, one of the two staging bases through which aerial reinforcements still could reach Rabaul.

As long as the Japanese had airfields at Kavieng and in the Admiralties, Allied leaders felt that Rabaul's air garrison might be rebuilt. The cost of such a risk-laden move appeared to be prohibitive, but there was no guarantee that future events might not make it appear worthwhile to *Imperial General Headquarters*. If the two positions were taken or neutralized, however, nothing but a trickle of enemy long-range aircraft would get through. The isolation of Rabaul would be complete.

The enemy avenue of approach from the Admiralities was blocked on 29 February, when a small Army reconnaissance force, outnumbered but not outmatched, was able to seize a beachhead on Los Negros. The Japanese garrison, cut off from all outside help, fought doggedly but hopelessly until it was wiped out. The fighting did little to impede the building progress of a base that was destined to play a major part in the advance to the Palaus and the Philippines. Seeadler Harbor proved to be everything in the way of an advance naval base that Rabaul's Simpson Harbor might have been, with the added virtues of a more favorable location and a cheaper price. Most missions flown from the airfields constructed on Los Negros supported the drive west along the New Guinea coast

or struck enemy bases in the Carolines. There was little call for the squadrons in the Admiralties to hit Rabaul or Kavieng. The capture of Emirau on 20 March 1944 sealed the fate of both enemy bases.

The decision to bypass Kavieng in favor of Emirau, like the earlier decision to bypass Rabaul, was made in Washington. In both cases, the consensus of JCS opinion, reinforced by the recommendations of Admirals Nimitz and Halsey, overweighed General MacArthur's belief that the major enemy bases constituted such a threat that they would have to be taken. By using Marines and ships that were ready to take part in the Kavieng operation, Admiral Halsey was able to effect a swift and bloodless occupation of Emirau. Planes flying from the airbase that was soon built on the island pounded Kavieng until the war's end, and took their turn, as well, in the raids flown against Rabaul.

Even though the taking of Emirau meant that the enemy's last chance of reinforcing the Southeast Area was gone, there was no thought of surrender on the part of General Imamura or Admiral Kusaka. Instead, the Japanese commanders kept their men keyed up, ready to fight a battle that never took place. Most of the Allied leaders and men who took part in the campaign against Rabaul passed on to more active fronts, and those who remained had the thankless task of keeping the Japanese beaten down.

For the most part, except where the Australians kept the ground campaign alive, what was left of the war in the Solomons and Bismarcks was a deadly boring routine for pilots and aircrews. Marine and RNZAF squadrons drew the majority of the unwanted assignments of maintaining the aerial blockade, and they did their job well. In light of postwar analyses of the destruction wrought by air attacks on the bypassed Japanese bases, it appears that much of the bombing effort was wasted, once the enemy was forced to go underground in order to survive. In fact, it now seems plausible to believe that the Japanese could have been contained just as well by using fewer planes and men.

The evaluation of any military campaign breeds such second guessing. Benefiting from knowledge of the situation of both sides at a given moment, it is easy to decide that certain operations were unnecessary and that others should have been conducted differently than they were. The men who planned and fought the battles, however, did so without the enlightenment provided by hindsight. They learned, instead, from the mistakes that they unwittingly made in the process of becoming veteran fighters.

Of all the lessons that were absorbed during the successful campaign to isolate and neutralize Rabaul, none was more important than the absolute necessity for interservice and inter-Allied cooperation. Few commands in the Pacific war evidenced such wholehearted subordination of self-interest as the South Pacific Forces who won their way from Guadalcanal to Emirau. Admiral Nimitz saw this spirit as "a guiding directive to all armed services of the United States, now and in the future." [5] There can be no more fitting memorial to the bitter fighting and sacrifice of the Rabaul campaign than its ample proof that the separate services meshed together well as one fighting team.

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[5] CinCPac–CinCPOA 1st End, dtd 15Sep44, to ComThirdFlt ltr to CominCh, dtd 3Sep44, Subj: SoPac Campaign, Narrative account (COA, NHD).

Bibliographical Notes

This history is based principally upon official Marine Corps records: the reports, diaries, journals, orders, etc., of the units and commands involved in the operations described. Records of the other armed services have been consulted where they are pertinent. On matters pertaining to activities at high strategic levels, the authors have drawn on the records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In order to cover gaps and inadequacies that occur in the sources consulted, extensive use has been made of the knowledge of key participants in the actions described. These men have been generous with their time in answering specific and general queries, in making themselves available for interviews, and in commenting on draft manuscripts. The military historical offices of the other services, of the New Zealand Government, and of the Japanese Government have read and commented upon those draft chapters bearing upon the activities of their own units.

Because this volume deals with the whole of the Allied campaign to neutralize Rabaul, many of the records used relate to more than one of the component operations. Such sources have been fully cited in the text and are discussed in relation to the particular operation where they have the most pertinency. All records cited, except as otherwise noted, are on file at, or obtainable through, the Archives of the Historical Branch, G–3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps.

A number of published works of general interest have been consulted frequently in the writing of this volume. The more important of these are listed below.

Books

Wesley Frank Craven and James Lee Cate, eds. *The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan—August 1942 to July 1944—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, v. 4. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950. This is the Air Force's official history for the period of the Rabaul neutralization campaign. Well documented, the book is a reliable source for the actions of Fifth Air Force and Thirteenth Air Force units and the attitudes and decisions of their commanders.

FAdm William F. Halsey and LCdr J. Bryan, III. *Admiral Halsey's Story*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947. This popular treatment of one of the most spectacular figures of the Pacific war presents a fascinating and useful picture of South Pacific command planning and decisions.

John Miller, Jr. *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul—The War in the Pacific—United States Army in World War II*. Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1959. A basic military source work, this volume of the Army's official history presents a comprehensive view of the CARTWHEEL campaign with particularly good coverage on the planning aspects.

Samuel Eliot Morison. *Breaking the Bismarcks Barrier—History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, v. VI. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950. Rear Admiral Morison's history was written with every cooperation from the Navy and can be considered its official history, even though the author disclaims this evaluation. Morison is at his best in describing action at sea and in analyzing Japanese moves and motives.

Robert Sherrod. *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*. Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952. This is a highly readable account of Marine air activities which was written with substantial Marine Corps research support; its text includes the results of many interviews and eyewitness accounts no longer available for study.

United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), Naval Analysis Division. *The Campaigns of the Pacific War*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946. This report attempts to present the broad picture of the war from the

Japanese viewpoint through brief descriptions of the various campaigns, but, unfortunately, it was prepared too soon after the event to gain deep perspective. The text contains many inaccuracies. The book is of great value, however, in presenting translations of many enemy documents that reveal Japanese wartime thinking.

United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), Naval Analysis Division. *Interrogations of Japanese Officials.* 2 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946. This is a companion report to *Campaigns* (above) and similarly of value in telling the Japanese side of the story.

PART I

STRATEGIC SITUATION—SPRING 1943

Official Documents

The JCS records, especially those of the Pacific Military Conference in March 1943, were particularly helpful in developing the course of the ELKTON plans as they fared in Washington. The transcripts and summaries give considerable useful background information on the state of U.S. and Allied forces in the South and Southwest Pacific. The war diaries of Commander, South Pacific furnish an excellent chronological narrative with emphasis on important messages sent and received.

Intelligence surveys by various higher headquarters were used extensively to build a picture of the state of Allied knowledge of enemy troops and terrain. In the case of the Russell Islands operation, action reports and war diaries of the units concerned furnished the narrative base. The main sources for the status report on the FMF were a study of Marine Corps ground training in World War II prepared in the Historical Branch and a history of FMFPac prepared at Pearl Harbor about 1951.

Japanese Sources

In the years immediately following the end of the war, former Japanese officials working under the auspices of General MacArthur's headquarters prepared a series of monographs detailing Japanese actions in many Pacific and Asian campaigns and at the various headquarters in the home islands. In the middle 50s, a number of these original studies were revised and expanded, again by knowledgeable Japanese. The monographs vary considerably in their value, but, on the whole, they are honestly presented and useful in gaining an insight into Japanese actions. The Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, which has a complete file of these studies, has prepared an annotated guide and index, *Guide to Japanese Monographs and Japanese Studies on Manchuria 1945–1960* (Washington, 1961), which is an excellent aid in evaluating the individual items.

Among the several Japanese monographs of the series that were used with this part, No. 45, the 382-page history of the *Imperial General Headquarters, Army Section,* was particularly helpful. It provides an overall view of the progress of the war as seen from Tokyo and contains appendices of Army orders. The operations record of the *Seventeenth Army* (No. 35 of the series) is valuable for its development of the Army's early actions in the central and northern Solomons campaigns. Similarly, the Japanese account (No. 99 of the series) of Southeast Area naval operations from February through October 1943 gives the Navy's view of the beginnings of joint defensive measures.

Books

Cdr Eric A. Feldt, RAN. *The Coastwatchers.* Melbourne and New York: Oxford University Press, 1946. This is a personalized account of the coastwatchers by one of their leaders which gives a good picture of individual exploits and of the overall contribution of these valiant men to the success of operations in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas.

Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley. *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940–1943—The War Department—United States Army in World War II.* Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1955. This book is an excellent, objective examination of the background of Allied action in the early years of the war.

John Miller, Jr. *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive—The War in the Pacific—United States Army in World War II.* Washington: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1949. This work is one of the first Army official histories written; it is also one of the best, and gives adequate, objective coverage to Marine actions in the first offensive of the war.

Samuel Milner. *Victory in Papua—The War in the Pacific—United States Army in World*

War II. Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1957. This is the basic source for any narrative of the fighting in New Guinea that paralleled the action on Guadalcanal.

PART II

TOENAILS OPERATION

Official Records

Discussions of the operations at New Georgia are based on the records of the units concerned. Included in the documents are special action reports, war diaries, and informal combat reports of the tactical units involved as well as the journals and special reports of the various staff sections. It must be remembered that the New Georgia operation was conducted by a composite force of Navy, Marine Corps, and Army units and that few arrangements for submission of action reports had been made. Accordingly, the various units reported either to the next senior echelon or to their own service, whichever they deemed proper. As a result, the reports of some Army units are in Marine Corps archives and *vice versa.* In general, however, most reports of tactical units are held by the service concerned. It must also be remembered that the desirability of maintaining official records was not fully recognized at this point of the war and that most commanders were naturally more interested in accomplishment of the combat mission than they were in keeping records. Consequently, most existing records are incomplete. The exceptions are the post-operation reports of the New Georgia Occupation Force (XIV Corps) and the 37th Infantry Division. These records are invaluable for a comprehensive account of the drawn-out Munda campaign.

One great assistance to the study of the New Georgia operation was the mid-1943 order by the Marine Corps which directed the preparation and submission of war diaries by tactical units. This resulted in the preparation of a number of organizational histories and post-operation reports which filled several large gaps in the general account of the campaign.

At the conclusion of the war, the Historical Section of the South Pacific Base Command prepared a manuscript of the history of the New Georgia campaign. This account includes a large number of well-drawn maps. This manuscript, held by the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, is helpful as a guide to obscure documents and memoranda which might not otherwise be encountered by researchers. The base command's manuscript forms the basis for many of the later histories of the New Georgia fighting.

Other official records which were informative included the combat narratives published during 1944 by the Office of Naval Intelligence. Two of these once-classified booklets used in this portion of the book were No. IX: *Bombardments of Munda and Vila-Stanmore, January–May, 1943* and No. X: *Operations in the New Georgia Area, 21June–5August 1943.* Taken from action reports of the commands and ships involved, these narrative accounts were helpful in synthesizing naval actions and coordinating the Navy's contributions to the combat action ashore.

Unofficial Sources

During the writing of the Marine Corps monograph on the New Georgia campaign, Major John N. Rentz of the Historical Division obtained a number of written comments from participants of all services, and these letters and memoranda, together with a number of personal interviews, form the basis for many of the personal recollections which augment the operational reports of the tactical units. Certain key individuals, who also commented on the draft of this book, helped clarify command problems encountered during the fighting. Valuable, in addition, were a number of articles and vignettes by combat correspondents in the *Marine Corps Gazette* and *Leatherneck* magazine of late 1943 and early 1944. These unofficial sources are helpful in filling in the background to combat operations.

Japanese Sources

Japanese records used in this account, in addition to the three monographs mentioned previously, were obtained mainly from captured documents interpreted by South Pacific Forces during the campaign and may be procured from either the Naval History Division or Marine Corps Historical Branch archives. A fourth monograph used in this account, No. 34 of the series held by the Office of the Chief of Military History, was the account of *Seventeenth Army* operations from May 1942 to January 1943, which provides useful background information on units that were engaged during the New Georgia fighting.

Books and Periodicals

A number of biographies and memoirs of ranking officers were consulted for information for this part of the book, but the most informative was Admiral Halsey's. Other published sources from which information was obtained include:

Oliver A. Gillespie. *The Pacific—The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939–1945.* Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1952. This is a useful study which describes the course of employment of New Zealand forces as seen from the New Zealand viewpoint.

Col Samuel B. Griffith, II. "Corry's Boys," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 36, no. 3 (Mar52), and "Action at Enogai," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 38, no. 3 (Mar54). These are personal experience stories by the former commanding officer of the 1st Raider Battalion during the fighting on New Georgia.

Jeter A. Isley and Philip A. Crowl. *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951. This book deals more with the development of amphibious doctrine and equipment than with operational history. The authors, however, have a number of pertinent conclusions relative to the campaign.

Maj John N. Rentz. *Marines in the Central Solomons.* Washington: Historical Branch, HQMC, 1952. This monograph forms the basis for this account. It is well written and contains considerable detail of Marine Corps small unit activities in the New Georgia Group.

Col Joseph E. Zimmer. *The History of the 43d Infantry Division, 1941–1945.* Baton Rouge, La.: Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1947. This is a perceptive history of the unit that did most of the fighting on New Georgia by the former commanding officer of 1/169.

Part III

NORTHERN SOLOMONS OPERATIONS

Official Records

In contrast to the Guadalcanal and New Georgia operations, the Northern Solomons campaign is fully documented from its earliest planning stages through the completion of the fighting. Most of the material in this section of the book was derived from the records of the tactical units and staff sections which participated in the three landings which comprised the Northern Solomons venture—the Treasurys, Choiseul, and Empress Augusta Bay. The III Amphibious Force war diaries for the months of October and November and the action report prepared after the Cape Torokina landings are valuable for information on the Navy's participation in the planning and execution of these operations. These documents are held by the Classified Operational Archives, Naval History Division.

The most informative account of the entire Northern Solomons campaign from its inception to its conclusion, however, is contained in the action report of I Marine Amphibious Corps. This account, in three parts, provides a day-by-day narrative of the three operations as well as a discussion of the planning difficulties, logistics preparations, and administrative problems of the campaign. Included are a number of overlays and maps plus special reports by various staff sections and tactical units. Also valuable are the separate administrative, intelligence, operational, and supply and evacuation journals of the corps which accompany the overall report.

The 3d Marine Division, which made the initial landings at Cape Torokina, provided a complete resume of the entire operation in the combat report written after the division's return to Guadalcanal. In addition to a narrative account of the campaign, the combat report includes a special report by each staff section of the division and action reports by each of the tactical units of the division as well as attached units. The three records—III Amphibious Force, I Marine Amphibious Corps, and the 3d Marine Division—provide a complete and comprehensive assessment of the entire campaign.

A contemporary account of the Bougainville operation, written prior to the end of the war by the Historical Section, Headquarters, Marine Corps, was of great assistance in outlining the campaign. This mimeographed study uses the above-mentioned records as the basis for the narrative. It is well written and quite descriptive in a number of instances. Equally as useful in maintaining the thread of action in the whole campaign was the Third Fleet Narrative Report prepared in the late summer of 1944.

Another once-classified account of the Solomon Islands campaign prepared by the Office of Naval Intelligence was also of value. This booklet, No. XII—*The Bougainville Landing and the Bat-*

tle of Empress Augusta Bay, 27 October–2 November 1943, was published in 1945. It describes the naval battles which were part of the Northern Solomons campaign.

Unofficial Documents

The comments and interviews obtained by Major Rentz in the writing of the monograph on Bougainville were also helpful in the preparation of this book. A number of the staff officers of IMAC as well as the 3d Marine Division submitted lengthy comments regarding the planning, preparations, and execution of the campaign, and all of these were of great value in filling in several gaps in the records. The various accounts were consulted and compared so that an accurate presentation could be made. As might be expected, recollections of one event may start a chain reaction which results in further recollections and remembrances. All of these were helpful, although not all could be used.

An account on the development of naval gunfire support during this period was also informative. This manuscript, "Naval Gunfire Support in the Solomon Islands Campaign," was written by Colonel Frederick P. Henderson in 1954 and traces the growth of fire support by naval vessels through the various South Pacific operations. It was especially valuable in regard to the Bougainville operation which was the proving ground for many gunfire support theories developed as a result of experience gained in earlier actions.

Among the comments received in regard to the draft of this book, those of Lieutenant General Edward A. Craig, Major General Victor A. Krulak, and Colonel Robert T. Vance were particularly helpful. General Craig was able to add considerably to the story of the 9th Marines, in particular during the Piva Trail battle. General Krulak's suggested corrections and additions to the narrative of the Choiseul raid were carefully based on contemporary records and clarified a number of points on which there had been conflicting or incomplete information. Colonel Vance's comments and sketch maps helped fix many details of the action of the 3d Parachute Battalion.

Japanese Sources

The intelligence journals and reports of various IMAC headquarters contain numerous partial translations which give a running picture of the Japanese situation. In addition to those Japanese monographs of the series previously mentioned, No. 100, covering the activities of Southeast Area naval forces from October 1943 to February 1944, was consulted frequently. It contains a daily operations log of naval air activities and is more concerned with naval aviation than other naval forces.

Books

The following books, in addition to those already mentioned, were used extensively in the preparation of the Bougainville chapters.

1st Lts Robert A. Aurthur and Kenneth Cohlmia. *The Third Marine Division*. LtCol Robert T. Vance, ed. Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948. This volume includes a colorful description of all the combat operations of the division in World War II.

John Monks, Jr. *A Ribbon and a Star, The Third Marines at Bougainville*. Illustrated by John Falter. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945. Although this book deals principally with the 3d Marines, it is, undoubtedly, the favorite of every Marine who fought at Bougainville because of its descriptive passages and sketches. The author and illustrator have captured the feeling of combat and the island.

Maj John N. Rentz. *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons*. Washington: Historical Section, Division of Information, HQMC, 1948. This official monograph contains a highly informative account of the entire campaign with great detail on the combat at Cape Torokina. Especially helpful was an outstanding descriptive appendix on the Northern Solomons islands.

PART IV

THE NEW BRITAIN CAMPAIGN

Official Documents

By far the most useful records of the CARTWHEEL operations on New Britain are the daily journals and message files of General Headquarters, SWPA and of ALAMO Force. These voluminous documents include memoranda of staff conversations, orders, plans, special reports, and just about every conceivable type of message bearing on military operations. They must be searched carefully, however, as documents that bear on a common topic are occasionally filed together out of chronological order. Like General Krueger's DEXTERITY Operation report,

which provides a good summary of New Britain actions, these reports are available from the World War II Records Division, Federal Records Center, Alexandria, Va.

The 1st Marine Division's action report for the Cape Gloucester operation, which was prepared in large part by one of the authors of the later campaign monograph, is well written and often exciting reading. The narrative, organized around phases of the fighting, is sometimes shaky on details, but subsequent comment by participants in the actions described clarified many points. The corrected narrative was the basis of the monographic account. The division's Talasea action report is not as complete, relatively speaking, as that covering Cape Gloucester, but it furnishes an adequate basis for a narrative when supplemented by contemporary documents of other commands.

The plans, orders, and reports of naval elements of Admiral Barbey's amphibious forces are particularly good for the earlier part of the campaign. The basic report and historical account of General Cunningham's command, supplemented by the messages contained in the ALAMO G–3 File, give a clear picture of the situation at Arawe. On the whole, the documentation of the operations in western New Britain is excellent at the higher levels and complete enough at lower echelons to insure that careful research will produce a reliable account.

Unofficial Documents

The letters and interviews resulting from the preparation of the New Britain campaign monograph are unusually complete and detailed. The comments, based on draft narratives and questions circulated by the Marine Corps Historical Branch, were used extensively in the writing of that narrative and have been consulted often in the preparation of this shorter account. Frequently, different aspects of the comments have been emphasized in this book.

Through the generosity of General Vandegrift, his personal correspondence when he was Commandant was made available for Historical Branch use. The letters that he received from General Rupertus are valuable in following the course of the preparations for the operation, the fighting itself, and the various aspects of the 1st Division's employment in the Southwest Pacific Area. Extracts from this correspondence, together with copies of some of the letters, are available in the Marine Corps Historical Branch Archives for use by qualified researchers.

Among the letters received in comment upon the draft narrative of this part, those from the other service historical agencies have been very effective in clarifying some of the language used and pointing the way to a more accurate account. General Shepherd and Admiral Barbey, who provided the most useful critical readings of the draft chapters, elaborated on their comments in later conversation with the author. Admiral Barbey's comprehensive remarks on the organization and philosophy of employment of amphibious forces in the SWPA were valuable in analyzing the separate development of amphibious techniques in the Central and Southwest Pacific.

Japanese Sources

The Allied Translation and Intelligence Section of General MacArthur's headquarters maintained forward echelons with the 1st Marine Division on Cape Gloucester which screened Japanese documents as they were picked up. Working closely with the language personnel of the division's own intelligence section, these ATIS translators were partially responsible for the effective flow of enemy intelligence to combat troops. The later full translation of such Japanese material in ATIS bulletins and other publications made the reconstruction of the actions of the *Matsuda Force* relatively easy. There is a wealth of Japanese material available from the Cape Gloucester operation, and credit for its recovery can be traced directly to the indoctrination the troops received in the importance of turning in any documents they found.

Two further Japanese monographs of the series held at the Office of the Chief of Military History were used extensively with this part. They are complementary, one (No. 127) deals with the operations of the *Eighth Area Army* and the other (No. 128) covers the activities of the *17th Division*. Together, the two studies give a good picture of operations in western New Britain as seen from Rabaul.

A manuscript translation of the book put out by the Matsu Publishing Company in Tokyo in 1955, *Dai Toa Senso Zenshi* [The Complete History of the Greater East Asia War], was made available by the Office of the Chief of Military History. This excellent study, written by Takushiro Hattori, who was a ranking staff officer

during the war and an historian afterwards, was very helpful in understanding Japanese actions during the fighting on New Britain. The book contains enough detail, based in part upon the studies for the Japanese monographs mentioned above, to be a useful strategic review for every major campaign in the war.

The War History Office, Defense Agency of Japan, very kindly consented to read the draft manuscripts of the Marine Corps operational history and began its welcome review with this part. The task, which involved a considerable amount of translation and research, was time consuming but worthwhile. The comments received, while not voluminous, have been excellent and have helped to clarify several heretofore moot points.

Books and Periodicals

Col Robert Amory, Jr., AUS, and Capt Ruben M. Waterman, AUS, eds. *Surf and Sand, The Saga of the 533d Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment and the 1461st Engineer Maintenance Company 1942–1945.* Andover, Mass.: The Andover Press, Ltd., 1947. This is the unit history of the Army amphibian engineers who were attached to the 1st Marine Division on New Britain.

General Headquarters, Army Forces, Pacific, Office of the Chief Engineer. *Amphibian Engineer Operations—Engineers in the Southwest Pacific 1941–1945,* v. IV. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1950. Although a good source for the activities of the Army small boat units that supported the Marines, this work contains some minor inaccuracies.

LtCol Frank O. Hough and Maj John A. Crown. *The Campaign on New Britain.* Washington: Historical Branch, HQMC, 1952. The basic source for the narrative of Marine actions on New Britain, this monograph contains numerous quotes from the draft chapter comments of participants. Among the several informative appendices is an outstanding one on the vegetation of the island and its effect on military operations, prepared by Captain Levi T. Burcham.

LtCol Robert B. Luckey. "Cannon, Mud, and Japs," *Marine Corps Gazette,* v. 28, no. 10 (Oct44). This is an interesting and very readable account of the employment of artillery at Cape Gloucester by the former executive officer of the 11th Marines.

George McMillan. *The Old Breed: A History of the First Marine Division in World War II.* Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1949. This unit history, which concerns itself more with the spirit of the 1st Division than with a recital of details of its combat actions, is generally accorded to be one of the finest books of its type written after the war.

United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), Military Analysis Division. *Employment of Forces Under the Southwest Pacific Command.* Washington: Government Printing Office, Feb47. Based closely upon studies prepared by historians with General MacArthur's headquarters, this booklet is a useful summary of actions in the SWPA.

PART V

MARINE AIR AGAINST RABAUL

Official Documents

The terrain studies of Rabaul prepared by various intelligence agencies were an important factor in understanding Rabaul as a target complex. The South Pacific air combat intelligence reports provided the best running account of air action and a good picture of the steady deterioration of Japanese airfield and aircraft strength. The archives of the Marine Corps Historical Branch contain enough material on various South Pacific air commands, including the all-important Strike Command, to develop a good picture of air action. There are voluminous Marine squadron and group reports of varying quality which can be exploited for a more detailed story than space allowed in this book.

The USAF Historical Archives at the Air University, Maxwell Field, Alabama, furnished the reports of Fifth and Thirteenth Air Force actions which supplement the material available in Navy and Marine records. Since ComAirSols was always a joint command, its activities lend themselves to treatment as an integrated whole. It is difficult to separate Marine air's contributions to the reduction of Rabaul from those of other services and our Allies. In order to present a balanced picture of the situation, this part was written with the joint aspect of the air offensive always in mind.

The sections concerning characteristics of major Japanese and Allied combat aircraft were taken primarily from Army Air Force and Navy intelligence publications. These booklets, plus

published interviews with pilots and operations officers with experience in the South Pacific area, provide a good means for assessing relative plane performance. Material on Japanese air crew training and experience levels was also found in intelligence reports as well as in the publications of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey.

Unofficial Documents

There is no body of letters and interviews in the Marine Corps Historical Branch archives relating to the air campaign against Rabaul as there is in the case of other campaigns which have been covered by monographic studies. Although there are a few pertinent letters among the papers acquired from the Sherrod aviation history project, these have limited value to a history of broad scope. Comments on the draft of this part from key commanders and staff officers, from the historical agencies of other services, particularly that of the Air Force, and from the New Zealand War History Office have been a useful check on the coverage and treatment of the aerial campaign.

Japanese Sources

Two more Japanese monographs of the highly useful series prepared for General MacArthur's headquarters were consulted frequently in the writing of this part. Both cover the activities of naval air during the period when Admiral Kusaka's *Eleventh Air Fleet*, with reinforcements from the *Combined Fleet's* carrier air groups, defended Rabaul. Monograph No. 140, Southeast Area Naval Air Operations (July–November 1943) is written in journal form with missions, claims, and losses featured and little discussion of combat operations. No. 142 which covers naval air operations from December 1943 to May 1944, provides a general review of the period when the Japanese lost the air battle over Rabaul. Included as an appendix to this last study is an analysis by a former staff officer of the *25th Air Flotilla* of Japanese air operations in the Southeast Area throughout the Allied advance on Rabaul and its subsequent isolation.

The difficult problem of assessing Japanese aircraft losses was eased considerably by the careful analysis of the draft manuscript made by the War History Office of the Defense Agency of Japan. The Japanese comments have been utilized as appropriate throughout the finished narrative.

Books

The fourth volume of the official history of the Army Air Forces, edited by Craven and Cate, and Sherrod's history of Marine Corps aviation have been the most important source works used for this part. In addition to these two books, both already cited as overall sources for this volume, the following were referred to frequently:

Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds. *Men and Planes—The Army Air Forces in World War II*, v. 6. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955. An excellent volume in this basic reference series, this book provides considerable information on the aircraft used by the Army Air Forces and the training of its aircrews.

Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), Aviation History Unit, OP–519B. *The Navy's Air War, A Mission Accomplished.* Lt A. R. Buchanan, USNR, ed. New York and London: Harper and Brothers [1946]. A summary of naval aviation's contribution to the war, this book is useful because of its information on aircrew training and aircraft development.

George C. Kenney. *General Kenney Reports, A Personal History of the Pacific War.* New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949. An interesting memoir that sheds some light on command decisions in the SWPA, this work has the fault, however, of relying on the damage statistics and claims of the time written about rather than those which have been proved more accurate by later research.

George Odgers. *Air War Against Japan 1943–1945—Australia in the War of 1939–1945 (Air).* Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957. This work is the prime source for information about the activities of the RAAF in the Southwest Pacific.

Masutake Okumiya and Jiro Horikoshi with Martin Caidin. *Zero!* New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1956. A fascinating book written by the designer of the Zero and an experienced Japanese naval pilot with the help of a veteran American writer on aviation matters. This account provides an exciting and informative history of the most formidable fighter used by the Japanese during the war.

SqnLdr J. M. S. Ross, RNZAF. *Royal New Zealand Air Force—Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War.* Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1955. An objective and useful study of the RNZAF actions in the South and Southwest Pacific, this work merits close scrutiny.

United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), Naval Analysis Division. Marshalls-Gilberts-New Britain Party. *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946. More than half of this study is taken up with appendices, which include extensive interviews with General Imamura, Admiral Kusaka, and principal subordinates. The narrative is particularly good in its summation of the effects of the Allied air campaign on the Japanese stronghold.

PART VI

CONCLUSION

Official Documents

The basic sources for the narrative of the seizure of the Green Islands and Emirau were the action reports of the III Amphibious Force. The account of fighting in the Admiralties was based upon the description in the official Army history. The story of the aerial attacks that obliterated the town of Rabaul and destroyed the supplies that the Japanese were unable to disperse or move underground is well covered in the SoPac study, *The Reduction of Rabaul,* which covers the period 19 February–15 May 1944.

The narrative of the 18 months of Allied aerial attacks on Rabaul and Kavieng, which followed the Japanese evacuation of all flyable aircraft from the bastion, was found in the reports and war diaries of ComAirSols and ComAirNorSols. Once Marine Mitchells bore the brunt of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's interdiction attacks, the reports of MAG–61 and ComAirEmirau became the basic sources.

In summing up the period covered by this volume, the most useful documents were the action reports prepared by principal commands for each operation covered and the narrative account of Third Fleet activities prepared by Admiral Halsey's staff and submitted to CinCPOA in September 1944. Much of the material already cited was reviewed again before the last chapter was written.

Unofficial Documents

Many of the senior officers who commented upon pertinent draft parts of this volume made significant observations on the course of the war in the South and Southwest Pacific Areas. These comments were carefully considered and, in many cases, are incorporated in the evaluations made in the summary chapter.

Japanese Sources

No one can read the monographs prepared by Japanese historians for the use of American military forces or follow the comments that they made on the draft of this volume without tremendous respect for their honesty and lack of subterfuge. The study made by Takushiro Hattori, previously mentioned, reflects this objective and analytical approach throughout its pages. The manuscript translation of Hattori's work, together with material derived from Japanese sources in the relevant volumes of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey's works, have been used to review the Japanese part in the Rabaul campaign.

Books

The basic published sources that underlie the narrative of this book were used again in preparing the concluding chapters. In addition to these volumes, listed in the opening section of these notes, the following were of particular use:

Maj Charles W. Boggs, Jr. *Marine Aviation in the Philippines.* Washington: Historical Division, HQMC, 1951. This official monograph was useful in developing the story of the deployment of 1st Wing squadrons from the Bismarcks and Solomons to the Philippines.

Kenneth W. Condit and Edwin T. Turnbladh. *Hold High the Torch, A History of the 4th Marines.* Washington: Historical Branch, G–3 Division, HQMC, 1960. This regimental history provided a useful source of information regarding the employment of the newly formed 4th Marines in the Emirau operation.

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Guide to Abbreviations

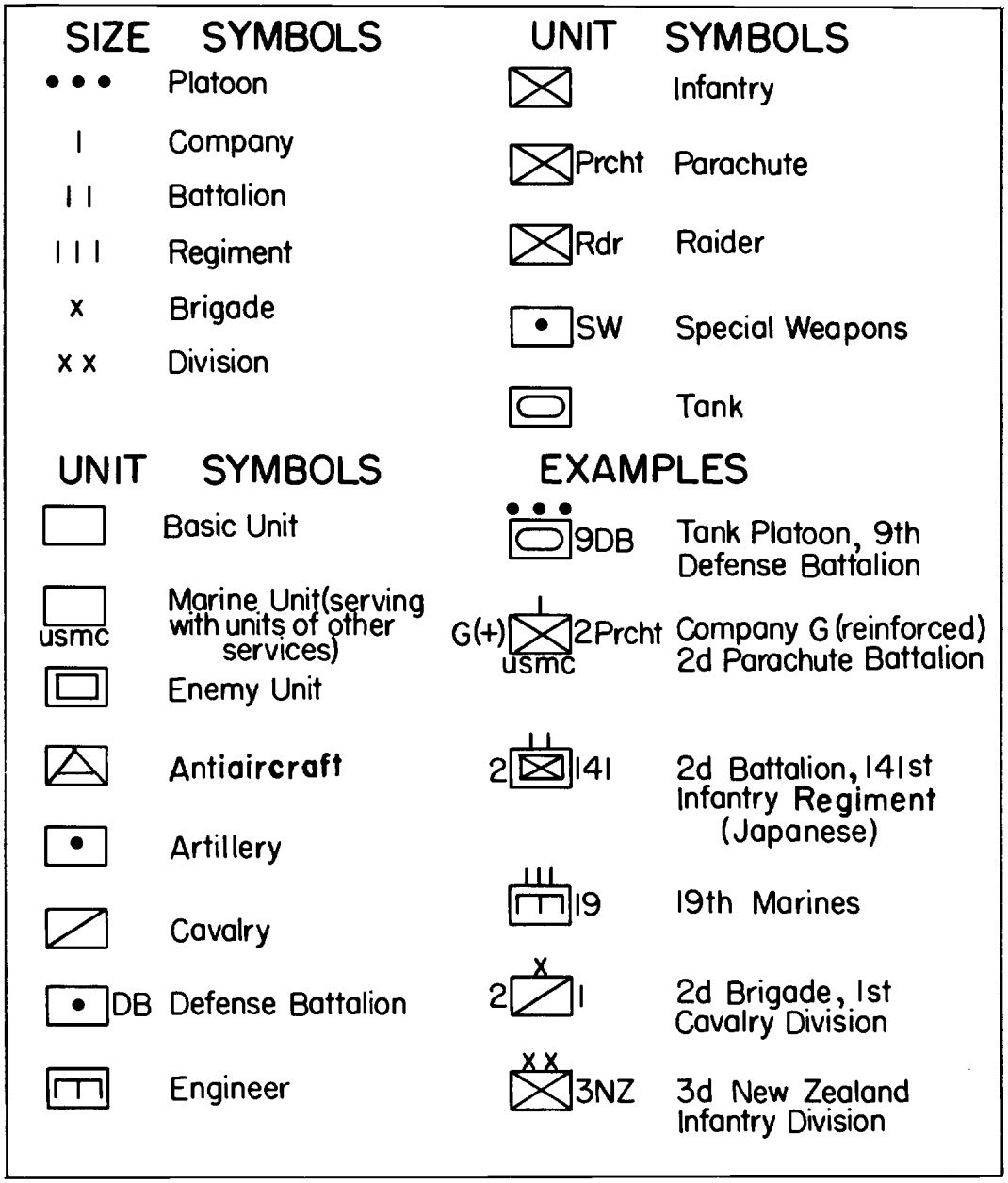
A–20	Army twin-engine attack plane, the Douglas Havoc
AA	Antiaircraft
AAF	Army Air Forces
ABC	American-British-Canadian
AC/AS	Assistant Chief of Staff, Air Staff
ACI	Air Combat Intelligence
ACofS	Assistant Chief of Staff
ACSI	Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence (Army)
Actg	Acting
ADC	Assistant Division Commander
Adm	Admiral
Admin	Administrative
AET	Advance Echelon Translation
AF	Air Force
AFB	Air Force Base
AFP	Army Forces, Pacific
AID	Air Information Division
AIF	Australian Imperial Forces
Air	Aircraft; Air Forces
AKA	Cargo ship, attack
Al	Allied
Alex	Alexandria
An	Annual
ANGAU	Australia-New Guinea Administrative Unit
Anx	Annex
APA	Transport, attack
APc	Transport, coastal (small)
APD	Transport, high speed
App	Appendix
AR	Action Report
Arty	Artillery
ATIS	Allied Translation and Intelligence Service
Avn	Aviation
B–17	Army four-engine bomber, the Boeing Flying Fortress
B–24	Army four-engine bomber, the Consolidated Liberator
B–25	Army twin-engine bomber, the North American Mitchell
B–26	Army twin-engine bomber, the Martin Marauder
BAR	Browning Automatic Rifle
Bd	Board
BGen	Brigadier General
Bn	Battalion
Br	Branch
Brig	Brigade
Bu	Bureau
Bul	Bulletin
C	Combat
C–2	Corps Intelligence Office(r)
C–47	Army twin-engine transport, the Douglas Skytrain.
C–54	Army four-engine transport, the Douglas Skymaster.
Capt	Captain
Cav	Cavalry
Cbt	Combat
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
Cdr	Commander
CEC	Civil Engineer Corps
Cen	Center
CG	Commanding General
CIC	Combat Intelligence Center
CinC	Commander in Chief
Cir	Circular
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
CO	Commanding Officer
Co	Company
CofS	Chief of Staff
Col	Colonel
Com	Commander
Comd	Command
CominCh	Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet.
CP	Command Post
Cpl	Corporal
CSNLF	Combined Special Naval Landing Force
CT	Combat Team
CTF	Commander Task Force
CTG	Commander Task Group
CWO	Chief Warrant Officer

Curr	Current
D–2	Division Intelligence Office(r)
D–3	Division Operations and Training Office(r)
DA	Department of the Army
DD	Destroyer
Def	Defense
Dep	Depot; Deputy
Dept	Department
DesDiv	Destroyer Division
DesRon	Destroyer Squadron
Det	Detachment
Dir	Director
Disp	Dispatch
Distr	Distribution
Div	Division
Docu	Document
DUKW	Amphibious truck
Ech	Echelon
Empl	Employment
End	Endorsement (Navy)
ESB	Engineer Shore Brigade
Est	Estimate
Evac	Evacuation
FAdm	Fleet Admiral
FEC	Far East Command
FEAF	Far East Air Forces
F5A	Army photo plane version of the P–38
F4F	Navy-Marine single-engine fighter, the Grumman Wildcat
F4U	Navy-Marine single-engine fighter, the Chance-Vought Corsair
F6F	Navy-Marine single-engine fighter, the Grumman Hellcat
Flt	Fleet
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FO	Field Order
For	Force
FRC	Federal Record Center
Fwd	Forward
G–2	Division (or larger unit) Intelligence Officer(r)
G–3	Division (or larger unit) Operations and Training Office(r)
Gen	General
GHQ	General Headquarters
GO	General Order
GPO	Government Printing Office
Grd	Guard
Gru	Group
Hist	History; Historical
Hq	Headquarters
HQMC	Headquarters, United States Marine Corps
ICPOA	Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas
IGHQ	Imperial General Headquarters
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
Ind	Indorsement (Army)
Inf	Infantry
Info	Information
Instn	Instruction
Intel	Intelligence
Is	Island(s)
Jap	Japanese
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JICPOA	Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas
JSP	Joint Staff Planners
JSSC	Joint Strategic Survey Committee
KIA	Killed in Action
LCdr	Lieutenant Commander
LCI	Landing Craft, Infantry
LCM	Landing Craft, Medium
LCP	Landing Craft, Personnel
LCP(R)	Landing Craft, Personnel (Ramp)
LCT	Landing Craft, Tank
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel
Ldg	Landing
LSD	Landing Ship, Dock
LST	Landing Ship, Tank
LT	Landing Team
Lt	Lieutenant
Ltr	Letter
LVT	Landing Vehicle, Tracked
LVT(A)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Armored)
MAC	Marine Amphibious Corps
Maj	Major
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group
Mar	Marine(s)
MASP	Marine Aircraft, South Pacific
MAW	Marine Aircraft Wing(s)
MBDAG	Marine Base Defense Aircraft Group
MBDAW	Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing
MC	Medical Corps
Med	Medical
Memo	Memorandum

MG	Marine Gunner
MIA	Missing in Action
MID	Military Intelligence Division
MIS	Military Intelligence Service
Misc	Miscellaneous
MLR	Main Line of Resistance
Mm	Millimeter
MS	Manuscript
Msg	Message
MTB	Motor Torpedo Boat
NATS	Naval Air Transport Service
Nav	Navy; Naval
NCB	Naval Construction Battalion
ND	Navy Department
NGOF	New Guinea Occupation Force
NHD	Naval History Division
NLF	Northern Landing Force
NLG	Northern Landing Group
Nor	Northern
NZ	New Zealand
O	Order
OB	Order of Battle
Obj	Objective
OCMH	Office of the Chief of Military History
Off	Office
ONI	Office of Naval Intelligence
Op	Operation
OPlan	Operation Plan
Org	Organizational
OS2U	Navy single-engine float plane, the Chance-Vought Kingfisher
P–38	Army twin-engine fighter, the Lockheed Lightning
P–39	Army single-engine fighter, the Bell Airacobra
P–40	Army single-engine fighter, the Curtiss Warhawk
P–61	Army twin-engine night fighter, the Northrop Black Widow
P–70	Army night fighter version of the A–20
Pac	Pacific
Para	Parachute
PB4Y	Navy-Marine four-engine bomber, the Consolidated Liberator
PBJ	Navy-Marine twin-engine bomber, the North American Mitchell
PBM	Navy twin-engine seaplane, the Martin Mariner
PBO	Navy twin-engine bomber, the Lockheed Hudson
PB2Y	Navy twin-engine seaplane, the Consolidated Coronado
Phib	Amphibious; Amphibious Forces
Plat	Platoon
PMC	Pacific Military Conference
POA	Pacific Ocean Areas
POW	Prisoner of War
PV	Navy-Marine twin-engine bomber and night fighter, the Vega Ventura
R–2	Regimental Intelligence Office(r)
R–3	Regimental Operations Office(r)
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
Rad	Radio
RAdm	Rear Admiral
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
Rdr	Raider
Recon	Reconnaissance
Recs	Records
Regs	Regulations
Regt	Regiment
R5D	Navy-Marine four-engine transport, the Douglas Skymaster
R4D	Navy-Marine twin-engine transport, the Douglas Skytrain
RN	Royal Navy
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
SAR	Special Action Report
SBD	Navy-Marine single-engine dive bomber, the Douglas Dauntless
SB–24	Army night bombing version of the B–24
SB2C	Navy-Marine single-engine dive bomber, the Curtiss-Wright Helldiver
SC	Submarine Chaser
SCAP	Supreme Commander Allied Powers
SCAT	South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command
SE	Southeast
Sec	Section; Secretary
Serv	Service
Sgt	Sergeant
Sit	Situation

SMS	Marine Service Squadron
SNLF	Special Naval Landing Force
So	South
Sols	Solomons
Sqn	Squadron
STAG	Special Task Air Group
Stf	Staff
Strat	Strategic
Subj	Subject
SWPA	Southwest Pacific Area
Tac	Tactical
TAGO	The Adjutant General's Office
TAIC	Technical Air Intelligence Center
TBF	Navy-Marine single-engine torpedo bomber, the Grumman Avenger
TBX	Medium-powered field radio
Tele	Telegram
TF	Task Force
TG	Task Group
Tg	Telegraph
Tk	Tank
TM	Technical Manual
TNT	Trinitro-toluol, a high explosive
T/O	Table of Organization
Trac	Tractor
Trans	Transport; Translation
Trng	Training
TSgt	Technical Sergeant
U	Unit
USA	United States Army
USAF	United States Air Force
USAFFE	United States Army Forces in the Far East
USAFISPA	United States Army Forces in the South Pacific Area
USASOS	United States Army Service of Supply
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy
USNR	United States Naval Reserve
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
VAdm	Vice Admiral
VB	Navy dive bomber squadron
VC	Navy composite squadron
VD	Navy photographic squadron
VF	Navy fighter squadron
VF(N)	Navy night fighter squadron
VMB	Marine bomber squadron
VMD	Marine photographic squadron
VMF	Marine fighter squadron
VMF(N)	Marine night fighter squadron
VMO	Marine observation squadron
VMSB	Marine scout bomber squadron
VMTB	Marine torpedo bomber squadron
WarD	War Diary
WD	War Department
WIA	Wounded in Action
WW II	World War II
YMS	Harbor mine sweeper

Military Map Symbols



Chronology

The following listing of events is limited to those coming within the scope of this book, and those forecasting events to be treated in the volumes to follow.

1943

23Jan---------- Casablanca Conference approves ELKTON plan for operations against Rabaul.

23–24Jan------- Kolombangara bombarded by cruiser-destroyer and carrier group.

7–8Feb--------- Japanese destroyers successfully evacuate 13,000 troops from Guadalcanal.

9Feb---------- Organized resistance on Guadalcanal ends.

12Feb---------- Gen MacArthur issues ELKTON I plan.

15Feb---------- ComAirSols, a joint air command, established on Guadalcanal.

21Feb---------- Russell Islands seized by 43d InfDiv troops reinforced by Marines.

2–5Mar-------- Battle of Bismarck Sea; US and Australian aircraft bomb Japanese destroyers and troop transports en route to Lae, New Guinea.

6Mar---------- U.S. naval force bombards Vila-Munda area.
First Japanese air raids on Russells.

29Mar--------- CARTWHEEL directive issued by JCS.

7Apr---------- FAdm Isoruku Yamamoto begins "I" Operation, designed to drive Allies out of Solomons and New Guinea.

15Apr---------- First of Russell Islands' air strips operational.

18Apr---------- Adm Yamamoto is killed when his plane is shot down by P–38s.

26Apr---------- Gen MacArthur issues ELKTON III, superseding previous ELKTON plans.

2May---------- Japanese commanders at Rabaul create *Southeast Detached Force* for the defense of the central Solomons.

25May--------- TRIDENT Conference in Washington ends; CCS decide to seize Marshalls and to move against Japanese outer defenses.

3Jun---------- Adm Halsey issues orders for assault on New Georgia Islands.

5Jun---------- First long-range daylight raid by Marine SBDs and TBFs on ships in Kahili-Buin waters.

16Jun---------- New Georgia Occupation Force FO #1 issued; sets D-Day as 30Jun.

21Jun---------- One-half of 4th RdrBn lands at Segi Point; begins operations in eastern New Georgia.

22–23Jun------- Army units begin Trobriand Islands invasion with landing on Woodlark Island.

28Jun---------- 4th RdrBn meets first resistance of New Georgia campaign while approaching Viru Harbor.

30Jun---------- Army troops, reinforced by Marine elements, land on Vangunu and Rendova. Army troops, reinforced by 12th DefBn, seize Kiriwina.

1Jul---------- Viru Harbor seized. 9th DefBn shells Munda from Rendova.

3Jul---------- Southern Landing Group lands on Zanana Beach.

5Jul—Northern Landing Group lands at Rice Anchorage. Cruiser-destroyer force bombards Vila, Kolombangara, and Bairoko Harbor.

5–6Jul—Battle of Kula Gulf; U.S. naval task force engages 10 Japanese destroyers carrying reinforcements and supplies to Kolombangara. Some troops land during battle.

8Jul—MajGen William H. Rupertus relieves MajGen Alexander A. Vandegrift as CG, 1st MarDiv.

10Jul—Northern Landing Group attacks and takes Enogai.

11Jul—Adm Halsey issues directive for an attack on an unannounced position in the Bougainville area; Gen Vandegrift, CG, IMAC, selected to head invasion force. Segi Point air strip become operational.

11–12Jul—Cruiser-destroyer force bombards Munda.

13Jul—2d naval Battle of Kolombangara marks end of Japanese attempts to resupply and reinforce their New Georgia garrison by destroyer.

20Jul—Northern Landing Group launches unsuccessful attack on Bairoko Harbor; falls back to Enogai under cover of one of heaviest air strikes of central Solomons campaign. Marine land-based aircraft attack Japanese shipping south of Choiseul; two enemy destroyers sunk.

5Aug—Munda airfield, main objective of central Solomons campaign, falls.

6–7Aug—Three Japanese destroyers sunk, one damaged, in Battle of Vella Gulf.

8–9Aug—Main body of *Southeast Detached Force* moves to Kolombangara.

9Aug—Northern and Southern Landing Groups of New Georgia Occupation Force establish contact.

11Aug—Adm Halsey issues orders for Vella Lavella invasion.

13Aug—Japanese *Imperial Headquarters* issues Navy Staff Directive No. 267, authorizing abandonment of central Solomons after delaying actions.

14Aug—Marine aircraft begin operations from Munda airfield as ComAir New Georgia opens command post there.

15Aug—Vella Lavella invaded in force; 4th DefBn included in invasion group.

24Aug—QUADRANT Conference in Quebec ends; CCS decide to attack Japan along both central and southwest Pacific routes.

25Aug—New Georgia campaign ends as Bairoko Harbor is seized without opposition.

27Aug—Marines and Seabees occupy Nukufetau, Ellice Islands; Arundel Island occupied by Army troops.

28Aug—Forward echelon of 7th DefBn occupies Nanumea, Ellice Islands.

29Aug—1st RdrRegt withdraws from New Georgia operation.

31Aug—1st MarDiv alerted for movement from Melbourne to advance staging area.

1Sep—ComAirNorSols formed at Espiritu Santo under command of BGen Field Harris in preparation for northern Solomons offensive.

4Sep—V Amphibious Corps (VAC) formed under command of MajGen Holland M. Smith. Australian troops land near Lae, New Guinea.

11Sep—CinCSWPA requests Adm Halsey to strike in northern Solomons in accordance with JCS directives.

15Sep---------- MajGen Charles D. Barrett relieves Gen Vandegrift as CG, IMAC.

16Sep---------- Army troops fighting on Arundel Island reinforced by three platoons of Marine defense battalion tanks.

17Sep---------- 3d NZ Div lands on Vella Lavella relieving Army landing force.

19Sep---------- 1st MarDiv combat teams begin departure from Melbourne.

20–21Sep------ MajGen Sasaki withdraws last Japanese survivors from Arundel as island is declared secure by Allied forces.

22Sep---------- Adm Halsey issues warning order for northern Solomons invasion of Treasury Islands and Empress Augusta Bay area of Bougainville. Gen MacArthur issues orders for DEXTERITY. Australian troops land at Finschhafen.

24Sep---------- ALAMO scouts begin reconnaissance of Cape Gloucester area.

25Sep---------- Forward echelon of IMAC Corps Troops land on Vella Lavella.

27Sep---------- IMAC issues instructions to 3d MarDiv for Bougainville operation. ComAirSols planes begin operations from Barakoma air strip.

28Sep---------- Japanese begin withdrawal from Kolombangara.

1Oct---------- Adm Halsey informs Gen MacArthur of decision to invade Bougainville on 1Nov and is promised maximum air assistance from SWPA air units. Low-level reconnaissance flights made over Cape Torokina region with ground officers acting as observers.

2–3Oct--------- Japanese complete safe withdrawal of some 9,400 troops from Kolombangara. Australian troops capture Finschhafen.

6Oct---------- Action in central Solomons ends as Army units make unopposed landing on Kolombangara.

6–7Oct--------- Battle of Vella Lavella; nine Japanese destroyers evacuating troops from Vella Lavella attacked by U.S. naval force.

8Oct---------- Gen Vandegrift reassumes command of IMAC upon death of Gen Barrett.

9Oct---------- 3d NZ Div declares Vella Lavella secure.

15Oct---------- IMAC issues OpO #1 directing 3d MarDiv to seize Cape Torokina. Beginning of intensified preinvasion air bombardments of Bougainville by Allied aircraft.

22Oct---------- IMAC directs 2d ParaBn to land on Choiseul, night of 27–28Oct, to conduct diversionary raid.

27Oct---------- Marine advance party lands at Atsinima Bay, north of Karuma River on Bougainville, to prepare for assault. 8th NZ Brig lands on Treasury Islands.

28Oct---------- 2d ParaBn lands on Choiseul.

31Oct---------- Bougainville invasion groups head for target area after rendezvous west of Guadalcanal.

1Nov---------- IMAC lands at Cape Torokina with 3d and 9th Marines and 2d RdrRegt in assault. First successful night air interception in Pacific by VMF(N)–531 aircraft.

1–2Nov-------- Battle of Empress Augusta Bay; U.S. fleet turns back Japanese naval attempt to counteract landing on Cape Torokina.

4Nov---------- 2d ParaBn withdraws from Choiseul.

5Nov---------- First carrier-based air strike at Rabaul.

6Nov—Elements of 21st Marines arrive to reinforce Bougainville beachhead.

7Nov—Japanese counterattack Bougainville beachhead by landing troops near Laruma River.

8Nov—Battle of Koromokina Lagoon ends as the Japanese landing force is defeated by elements of 3d, 9th, and 21st Marines. First elements of 37th InfDiv arrive at Bougainville. MajGen Roy S. Geiger assumes command of IMAC as Gen Vandegrift is ordered home to become 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

11Nov—Additional elements of 21st Marines arrive on Bougainville.

13Nov—Pre-invasion bombardment of western New Britain targets begins.

17Nov—Japanese aircraft attack convoy carrying Marine reinforcements to Bougainville; APD *McKean* is sunk with loss of some personnel from 21st Marines.

19Nov—Battle of Piva Forks begins as final elements of 37th InfDiv arrive.

20Nov—MajGen Ralph H. Mitchell assumes command of AirSols.

25Nov—Carrier-based aircraft bomb Kavieng, New Ireland. Battle of Cape St. George concludes series of night naval engagements of the Solomons campaigns.

26Nov—3d MarDiv advances to Piva River line, having defeated Japanese in Battle of Piva Forks.

29Nov—1st ParaBn conducts Koiari Beach raid on Bougainville.

30Nov—EUREKA Conference at Teheran ends. Stalin agrees to commit Russian forces against Japan after Germany is defeated. CG, ALAMO Force issues Field Order #5 for Arawe and Cape Gloucester operations.

7Dec—SEXTANT Conference at Cairo concludes; CCS set up timetable for offensive against Japan.

15Dec—Operation DEXTERITY begins with invasion of Arawe. BACKHANDER force conducts final rehearsal at Cape Sudest, New Guinea.

17Dec—First AirSols fighter sweep over Rabaul from Bougainville air strips.

26Dec—1st MarDiv lands on Cape Gloucester at Silimati Point and Tauali.

28Dec—Relief of 3d MarDiv begins as Americal Division takes responsibility for eastern sector of Bougainville beachhead.

30Dec—1st Marines secures Cape Gloucester airfield.

1944

1Jan—BGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., issues first ADC attack order for the drive on Hill 660.

2Jan—Task Force MICHAELMAS lands at Saidor, New Guinea.

11Jan—Aogiri Ridge taken, renamed Walt's Ridge.

13Jan—CinCPac-CinCPOA GRANITE plan issued; outlines tentative operation plans CATCHPOLE (Marshalls) and FORAGER (Marianas).

16Jan—3d MarDiv completes withdrawal from Bougainville. Hill 660 taken by 3/7 on Cape Gloucester.

31Jan—Marines and Army troops land on Kwajalein and Majuro Atolls.

1Feb—Marshalls invasion continues as Marines land on Roi and Namur Islands.

2Feb—Roi and Namur secured.

7Feb—Kwajalein Atoll secured.

10Feb---------- Operation DEXTERITY declared at an end by CG, ALAMO Force.
12Feb---------- Elements of the 1st Marines land on Rooke Island.
16Feb---------- Western New Britain secured as Gilnit patrol group meets Army patrol from Arawe on Itni River.
18Feb---------- Marines and Army units land on Eniwetok Atoll.
19Feb---------- Rabaul installations attacked heavily by Marine, Navy, and Army aircraft; after this date, the enemy abandons air defense of Rabaul.
21Feb---------- 3/5 lands at Karai-ai.
25Feb---------- 2/5 lands at Iboki Plantation.
29Feb---------- 1st Cavalry Division lands in the Admiralties.
6Mar---------- 5th Marines, Reinforced, land at Volupai Plantation for the Talasea operation.
8Mar---------- Japanese begin attack on 37th InfDiv sector on Bougainville.
9Mar---------- Talasea declared secure.
18Mar---------- Plans for Hollandia invasion issued jointly by CinCSWPA and CinCPac-CinCPOA.
20Mar---------- 4th Marines seize Emirau.
24Mar---------- Last intensive enemy attack on Bougainville beachhead.
25Mar---------- IMAC, Corps Troops, 1st and 3d MarDivs transferred to CinCPOA operational control.
27Mar---------- Japanese begin withdrawal from Empress Augusta Bay area.
1Apr---------- Army troops begin advance up Numa Numa Trail on Bougainville.
22Apr---------- Army forces land at Hollandia. 1st MarDiv patrol clashes with enemy on Cape Gloucester for last time.
23Apr---------- 1st MarDiv turns responsibility for New Britain over to 40th InfDiv.
15Jun---------- CinCSWPA assumes command of all forces west of longitude 159° East; South Pacific campaign against Japanese virtually ended.
21Jun---------- 3d DefBn, which landed 1Nov-43 on Bougainville and was last FMF ground unit in active SoPac area, withdrawn to Guadalcanal.
27Nov---------- 40th InfDiv relieved on New Britain by Australian 5th Division.
3Dec---------- First Marine air units assigned to Philippines campaign at Leyte.

1945

11Jan---------- Marine Air Groups, Dagupan (1st ProvMAW) organized at Luzon.
15Aug---------- 1st MAW Hq moved to Philippines.
6Sep---------- Japanese surrender Rabaul to the Australians.

Fleet Marine Force Status—30 April 1943 [1]

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Outside U.S.A.				
South Pacific Area				
New Caledonia				
Special & Service Battalion, IMAC	134	975	8	23
Regulating Station (Transients), IMAC	43	1,046	24	59
1st Corps Motor Transport Battalion (less Company C)	21	416	1	9
1st Corps Medical Battalion	1	109	38	348
1st Corps Naval Construction Battalion	----	----	20	791
IMAC Barrage Balloon Group	43	910	2	8
1st Marine Raider Battalion	35	873	3	19
1st Marine Parachute Regiment (less 4th Battalion)	99	1,928	13	66
1st Marine Depot Company*	3	110	----	----
14th Replacement Battalion*	39	1,199	10	111
1st Separate Wire Platoon	1	45	----	----
1st Base Depot	44	700	1	21
4th Base Depot (w/Company C, 1st Corps Motor Transport Battalion)	48	831	----	----
Marine Air Depot Squadron–1, 1st MAW	12	308	5	16
Marine Air Base Squadron–1, 1st MAW	10	340	----	----
Headquarters Squadron–25, MAG–25	31	223	17	90
Service Squadron–25, MAG–25	11	302	----	----
Marine Utility Squadron–152, MAG–25	46	223	----	----
Marine Utility Squadron–153, MAG–25	20	229	----	----
Marine Utility Squadron–253, MAG–25	57	226	----	----
Area Sub-Total	698	10,993	142	1,561
New Zealand				
2d Marine Division	884	16,727	115	1,525
155mm Howitzer Battalion, IMAC	30	572	1	14
2d Antitank Battalion	31	698	1	12
3d Defense Battalion	57	1,024	4	22
4th Defense Battalion	54	1,096	5	19
16th Replacement Battalion*	30	1,018	19	108
2d Base Depot	15	295	1	14

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
New Zealand—Continued				
3d Marine Division (less 3d Marines, Reinf)	650	12, 303	95	1, 172
1st Aviation Engineer Battalion	29	615	3	13
3d Base Depot	11	226	1	9
Headquarters Squadron-2, 2d MAW	49	409	6	13
Headquarters Squadron-14, MAG-14	23	382	5	7
Service Squadron-14, MAG-14	11	244		10
Area Sub-Total	1, 874	35, 609	256	2, 938
Guadalcanal-Tulagi				
9th Defense Battalion	48	1, 071	3	16
14th Defense Battalion	38	772	3	22
2d Aviation Engineer Battalion	36	615	1	9
Marine Fighter Squadron-123, MAG-11	33	254	1	-------
Marine Fighter Squadron-124, MAG-12	27	259	1	7
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-132, MAG-11	34	257	1	4
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-143, MAG-12	34	328	1	2
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-233, MAG-11	31	233	1	4
Area Sub-Total	281	6, 247	12	64
Florida Island				
11th Defense Battalion	47	1, 088	4	22
Russell Islands				
10th Defense Battalion	46	1, 070	4	22
Espiritu Santo				
1st Marine Raider Regiment (less 1st Battalion)	108	2, 514	14	79
Headquarters Squadron-1, 1st MAW	72	506	15	11
Marine Air Repair & Salvage Squadron-1, 1st MAW	7	181	-------	7
Marine Photographic Squadron-154, 1st MAW	29	415	2	10
Headquarters Squadron-11, MAG-11	31	500	11	6
Service Squadron-11, MAG-11	17	333	-------	7
Marine Fighter Squadron-112, MAG-11	35	250	1	8
Marine Fighter Squadron-121, MAG-11	52	250	1	4
Marine Fighter Squadron-213, MAG-11	29	206	1	7
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-131, MAG-11	28	223	-------	-------
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-141, MAG-11	8	270	1	5
Marine Fighter Squadron-122, MAG-12	33	226	1	7

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Espiritu Santo—Continued				
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-142, MAG-12	32	267	1	8
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-234, MAG-12	27	259	1	6
Headquarters Squadron-21, MAG-21	17	267	5	12
Service Squadron-21, MAG-21	8	172		
Marine Fighter Squadron-214, MAG-21	27	233		
Marine Fighter Squadron-221, MAG-21	32	205		
Area Sub-Total	592	7, 277	54	177
Efate				
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-144, MAG-11	38	268	1	
Headquarters Squadron-12, MAG-12	27	341	7	38
Service Squadron-12, MAG-12	11	224		
Area Sub-Total	76	833	8	38
Funafuti				
5th Defense Battalion (Reinf)	47	1, 046	34	279
Samoa Islands				
Headquarters, Defense Force	24	108	7	4
Signal Company, Defense Force	7	172		
Base Depot, Fleet Marine Force	48	686	2	15
13th Replacement Battalion	20	992	5	38
15th Replacement Battalion	29	990	5	60
4th Garrison Replacement Detachment	8	298		
3d Marines (Reinf)	214	4, 503	23	447
2d Defense Battalion (Reinf)	133	1, 820	19	148
3d Marine Brigade (including 22d Marines)	230	3, 731	25	187
Headquarters Squadron-13, MAG-13	34	267	7	18
Service Squadron-13, MAG-13	10	194		
Marine Fighter Squadron-111, MAG-13	26	159	1	8
Marine Fighter Squadron-441, MAG-13	30	239	1	8
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-151, MAG-13	40	281	1	8
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-241, MAG-13	31	221		
Area Sub-Total	884	14, 661	96	941

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Wallis Island				
8th Defense Battalion (Reinf)	115	2, 171	37	720
Southwest Pacific Area				
Australia				
1st Marine Division	956	16, 825	121	1, 709
7th Replacement Battalion*	22	957	5	39
Area Sub-Total	978	17, 782	126	1, 748
Central Pacific Area				
Oahu				
Headquarters, Marine Forces, 14th Naval District	32	121	6	18
12th Defense Battalion	47	1, 089	4	22
Headquarters Squadron, MAWPac	14	50	1	----
Headquarters Squadron–4, 4th MBDAW	27	235	15	----
Marine Utility Squadron–252, 4th MBDAW	24	187	1	----
Headquarters Squadron–24, MAG–24	22	280	8	23
Service Squadron–24, MAG–24	8	194	----	----
Marine Fighter Squadron–222, MAG–24	38	228	1	7
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron–235, MAG–24	39	285	1	8
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron–236, MAG–24	20	249	1	8
Area Sub-Total	271	2, 918	38	86
Midway				
6th Defense Battalion	84	2, 075	3	31
Headquarters Squadron–22, MAG–22	9	111	2	3
Service Squadron–22, MAG–22	2	85	----	----
Marine Fighter Squadron–215, MAG–22	30	225	1	8
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron–244, MAG–22	31	236	1	8
Area Sub-Total	156	2, 732	7	50
Palmyra				
1st Defense Battalion	57	1, 195	3	28
Marine Fighter Squadron–211, 4th MBDAW	41	296	2	6
Area Sub-Total	98	1, 491	5	34

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Johnston				
16th Defense Battalion	46	888	1	12
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-243, 4th MBDAW	16	137	1	7
Area Sub-Total	62	1, 025	2	19
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba				
13th Defense Battalion	68	1, 232	4	16
St. Thomas, Virgin Is ands				
Marine Scouting Squadron-3	26	88		
West Coast, U.S.A.				
Camp Elliott				
Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, San Diego Ar a	20	51	2	
Headquarters Company, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet	38	232	8	16
Service Company, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet	4	102		
Signal Company, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet	28	332		
Reconnaissance Company, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet	7	98		2
Amphibious Tractor Detachment, Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet	1	25		1
1st Corps Signal Construction Company	6	199		
1st Corps Signal Operation Company	4	198		
17th Replacement Battalion	10	145	15	77
18th Replacement Battalion	4	57	6	
Training Center, Camp Elliott	407	6, 578	59	478
Base Depot, Fleet Marine Force	31	398	3	23
Company B, 4th Parachute Battalion	4	157		
Area Sub-Total	564	8, 572	93	597
Camp Pendleton				
24th Marines (Reinf)	187	3, 680	14	91
1st Corps Tank Battalion (Medium)	30	807	1	9
Training Center, Camp Pendleton	187	2, 655	22	510
Area Sub-Total	404	7, 142	37	610

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Camp Dunlap				
2d Airdrome Battalion	53	853	3	27
Camp Gillespie				
Parachute Training School	21	590	1	11
San Diego				
Headquarters Squadron, Service Group, Marine Fleet Air, West Coast	46	212	11	28
Supply Squadron–5	17	235		
Air Regulating Squadron–1	7	632		4
Air Regulating Squadron–2	6	660		178
Air Regulating Squadron–3	111	128	2	3
Air Regulating Squadron–4	7	554		
Area Sub-Total	194	3,011	14	224
Kearney				
Headquarters Squadron–15, MAG–15	35	231	5	17
Service Squadron–15, MAG–15	11	274		
Marine Observation Squadron–155, MAG–15	25	269		
Marine Observation Squadron–251, MAG–15	7	206		7
Marine Photographic Squadron–254, MAG–15	25	353	2	8
Marine Utility Squadron–353, MAG–15	43	338		
Area Sub-Total	146	1,671	7	32
El Toro				
Headquarters Squadron–23, MAG–23	15	128	9	15
Service Squadron–23, MAG–23	7	140		
Marine Fighter Squadron–223, MAG–23	5	141		
Marine Fighter Squadron–224, MAG–23	6	150		
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron–231, MAG–23	13	169		
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron–232, MAG–23	42	226		
Headquarters Squadron–41, MBDAG–41	23	228	5	14
Service Squadron–41, MBDAG–41	13	173		
Marine Fighter Squadron–113, MBDAG–41	10	243		
Marine Fighter Squadron–212, MBDAG–41	36	240	1	8
Area Sub-Total	170	1,838	15	27

See footnote at end of table.

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Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Santa Barbara				
Headquarters Squadron–42, MBDAG–42	13	151	6	18
Service Squadron–42, MBDAG–42	12	191	----	----
Marine Fighter Squadron–422, MBDAG–42	10	116	----	----
Area Sub-Total	35	458	6	18
El Centro				
Headquarters Squadron–43, MBDAG–43	26	565	4	12
Service Squadron–43, MBDAG–43	8	122	----	----
Marine Fighter Squadron–216, MBDAG–43	6	90	----	----
Area Sub-Total	40	777	4	12
Mojave				
Headquarters Squadron–44, MBDAG–44	24	128	5	13
Service Squadron–44, MBDAG–44	9	117	----	----
Marine Fighter Squadron–225, MBDAG–44	6	63	----	----
Area Sub-Total	39	308	5	13
East Coast, U.S.A.				
New River				
Headquarters Battalion, Training Center	64	1, 092	19	80
School Battalion, Training Center	165	679	35	54
Signal Battalion, Training Center	70	2, 826	1	56
Quartermaster Battalion, Training Center	72	676	----	----
Engineer Battalion, Training Center	116	906	22	1, 087
Artillery Battalion, Training Center	130	680	1	6
Parachute Battalion, Training Center	19	555	2	30
Rifle Range Battalion, Training Center	12	312	----	----
Infantry Battalion, Training Cente	22	561	----	----
Barrage Balloon Activities	16	113	9	370
23d Marines (Reinf)	260	3, 177	23	129
25th Marines (Reinf)	202	2, 724	10	124
1st Airdrome Battalion	46	1, 030	3	21
51st Composite Defense Battalion	20	511	3	22
19th Replacement Battalion	31	1, 068	5	61

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
New River—Continued				
Company A, 4th Parachute Battalion	13	265		
2d Marine Depot Company	3	110		
3d Marine Depot Company	3	110		
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-341, MAG-34	14	146		
Area Sub-Total	1, 278	17, 541	133	2, 040
Norfolk				
Base Depot, Fleet Marine Force	24	207		4
Cherry Point				
Headquarters Squadron-3, 3d MAW	27	171	8	10
Marine Bomber Squadron-413, 3d MAW	2	16		
Headquarters Squadron-31, MAG-31	8	37	3	34
Service Squadron-31, MAG-31	4	70		
Headquarters Squadron-32, MAG-32	7	109	3	32
Service Squadron-32, MAG-32	6	72		
Headquarters Squadron-33, MAG-33	10	77	4	41
Service Squadron-33, MAG-33	5	55		
Headquarters Squadron-34, MAG-34	8	87	3	27
Service Squadron-34, MAG-34	6	80		
Headquarters Squadron-35, MAG-35	10	27		
Service Squadron-35, MAG-35	5	62		
Marine Observation Squadron-351, MAG-35	1	28		
Marine Utility Squadron-352, MAG-35	10	50		
Headquarters Squadron-53, MAG-53	16	35	1	
Service Squadron-53, MAG-53	6	83		
Marine Night Fighter Squadron-531, MAG-53	13	159		
Marine Night Fighter Squadron-532, MAG-53	4	57		
Area Sub-Total	148	1, 275	22	144
Oak Grove				
Marine Fighter Squadron-321, MAG-32	14	121		
Atlantic				
Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron-331, MAG-33	7	117	1	2

See footnote at end of table.

Unit and location	Strength			
	USMC		USN	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Parris Island				
Marine Fighter Squadron-311, MAG-31	12	126		
Total Fleet Marine Force (Ground) Overseas	4, 812	91, 745	698	8, 306
Total Fleet Marine Force (Air) Overseas	1, 507	14, 060	131	409
Total Fleet Marine Force (Ground) in U.S.A	2, 329	34, 759	267	3, 289
Total Fleet Marine Force (Air) in U.S.A	819	9, 258	73	471
Total Fleet Marine Force Overseas	6, 319	105, 802	829	8, 715
Total Fleet Marine Force in U.S.A	3, 148	44, 017	340	3, 760
Total Fleet Marine Force	9, 467	149, 822	1, 169	12, 475

[1] Strength figures and unit designations and locations were abstracted from the FMF Status Reports, Ground and Air, for April 1943 prepared by the M-3 Section, Headquarters Marine Corps. Units en route to the indicated areas are designated by an asterisk *.

Table of Organization E–100 Marine Division—15 April 1943 [1]

Unit	USMC		USN		Totals	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Division Headquarters	(51)	(139)	(8)	(13)	(59)	(152)
Special Troops	157	2,098	14	46	173	2,144
Headquarters Battalion	(83)	(736)	(11)	(21)	(94)	(757)
Headquarters Company	(60)	(328)	(11)	(21)	(71)	(349)
Signal Company	(17)	(313)			(17)	(313)
Military Police Company	(6)	(95)			(6)	(95)
Special Weapons Battalion	(38)	(703)	(2)	(14)	(40)	(717)
Headquarters & Service Battery	(13)	(73)	(2)	(14)	(15)	(87)
Antiaircraft Battery	(7)	(300)			(7)	(300)
3 Antitank Batteries (each)	(6)	(110)			(6)	(110)
Tank Battalion	(36)	(659)	(1)	(11)	(37)	(670)
Headquarters & Service Company	(11)	(64)	(1)	(9)	(12)	(73)
3 Light Tank Companies (each)	(6)	(155)			(6)	(155)
Scout Company	(7)	(130)		(2)	(7)	(132)
Service Troops	78	1,682	42	398	120	2,080
Service Battalion	(27)	(614)	(2)	(18)	(29)	(632)
Headquarters Company	(8)	(43)	(2)	(10)	(10)	(52)
Service & Supply Company	(13)	(433)		(9)	(13)	(442)
Ordnance Company	(6)	(138)			(6)	(138)
Motor Transport Battalion	(28)	(489)	(1)	(9)	(29)	(498)
Headquarters & Service Company	(13)	(165)	(1)	(9)	(14)	(174)
3 Transport Companies (each)	(5)	(108)			(5)	(108)
Amphibian Tractor Battalion	(22)	(454)	(1)	(9)	(23)	(463)
Headquarters & Service Company	(7)	(64)	(1)	(9)	(8)	(73)
3 Tractor Companies (each)	(5)	(130)			(5)	(130)
Medical Battalion	(1)	(125)	(38)	(362)	(39)	(487)
Headquarters & Service Company	(1)	(5)	(3)	(12)	(4)	(17)
5 Medical Companies (each)		(24)	(7)	(70)	(7)	(94)
Engineer Regiment	74	1,548	35	860	109	2,408
Headquarters & Service Company	(22)	(256)	(5)	(7)	(27)	(263)
Engineer Battalion	(21)	(614)	(1)	(9)	(22)	(623)
Headquarters Company	(6)	(44)	(1)	(9)	(7)	(53)
3 Engineer Companies (each)	(5)	(190)			(5)	(190)

See footnote at end of table.

Unit	USMC		USN		Totals	
	Off	Enl	Off	Enl	Off	Enl
Engineer Regiment—Continued						
Pioneer Battalion	(31)	(678)	(3)	(32)	(34)	(710)
Headquarters Company	(7)	(78)	(3)	(32)	(10)	(110)
3 Pioneer Companies (each)	(8)	(200)			(8)	(200)
Naval Construction Battalion			26	812	26	812
Headquarters Company			(14)	(134)	(14)	(134)
3 Construction Companies (each)			(4)	(226)	(4)	(226)
Artillery Regiment	188	2, 956	9	54	197	3, 010
Headquarters & Service Battery	(20)	(171)	(4)	(9)	(24)	(180)
3 Pack Howitzer Battalions (each)	(34)	(561)	(1)	(9)	(35)	(570)
Headquarters & Service Battery	(13)	(129)	(1)	(9)	(14)	(138)
3 Pack Howitzer Batteries (each)	(7)	(144)			(7)	(144)
2 Howitzer Battalions (each)	(33)	(551)	(1)	(9)	(34)	(560)
Headquarters & Service Battery	(15)	(125)	(1)	(9)	(16)	(134)
3 Howitzer Batteries (each)	(6)	(142)			(6)	(142)
3 Infantry Regiments (each)	137	2, 984	11	110	148	3, 094
Headquarters & Service Company	(21)	(146)	(5)	(14)	(26)	(160)
Weapons Company	(8)	(189)			(8)	(189)
3 Infantry Battalions (each)	(36)	(883)	(2)	(32)	(38)	(915)
Headquarters Company	(10)	(93)	(2)	(32)	(12)	(125)
Weapons Company	(8)	(220)			(8)	(220)
3 Rifle Companies (each)	(6)	(190)			(6)	(190)
Division Totals	908	17, 236	133	1, 688	1, 041	18, 924

[1] All unit strength figures enclosed in parentheses are included in the strength totals of parent units.

MAJOR WEAPONS AND TRANSPORTATION—MARINE DIVISION

Weapons	Number	Transportation	Number
Carbine, .30 cal., M–1	11, 074	Ambulance:	
Flamethrower, portable	24	¼-ton, 4 x 4	48
Gun:		½-ton, 4 x 4	11
37mm, antitank	54	Car, 5-passenger	3
40mm, antiaircraft	16	Motorcycle	12
75mm, antitank, self-propelled	12	Station wagon, 4 x 4	12
Gun, machine:		Tractor:	
.30 cal., M1919A4	682	amphibian	100
.30 cal., M1917A1	108	miscellaneous	73
.50 cal., M2	343	Trailer:	
Gun, submachine, .45 cal	78	¼-ton, cargo	92
Howitzer:		½-ton, dump	20
75mm pack	36	1-ton, cargo	125
105mm	24	1-ton, water	81
Launcher, rocket, antitank, M–1	243	miscellaneous	123
Mortar:		Truck:	
60mm	81	¼-ton, 4 x 4	375
81mm	81	¼-ton, 4 x 4, with radio	134
Pistol, .45 cal	299	1-ton, 4 x 4, cargo	268
Rifle, .30 cal., M–1	8, 030	1-ton, 4 x 4, with radio	22
Rifle, Browning, automatic	558	2½-ton, 4 x 4, cargo	48
Shotgun, 12 gauge	306	2½-ton, 6 x 6, cargo	198
Tank, light, with armament	54	2½-ton, 6 x 6, dump	51
Tank, light, recovery	3	miscellaneous	51

Marine Task Organization and Command List[1]

MARINE GROUND UNITS

A. SEIZURE OF THE RUSSELLS (21 February–20 June 1943)

3d Marine Raider Battalion
(21Feb–20Mar43)

CO..... Col Harry B. Liversedge (to 15 Mar43)
LtCol Samuel B. Yeaton (from 15Mar)

10th Defense Battalion
(24Feb–20Jun43)

CO..... Col Robert E. Blake

Detachment, 11th Defense Battalion
(21Feb–28Mar43)

CO..... Maj Joseph L. Winecoff

B. NEW GEORGIA OPERATION (20 June–16 October 1943) [2]

Forward Echelon, IMAC Corps Troops
(25Sep–16Oct43)

CO..... Maj Donald M. Schmuck

Headquarters, 1st Marine Parachute Regiment
(8–16Oct43)

CO..... LtCol Robert H. Williams
ExO..... Maj Jackson B. Butterfield (actg)
R–3..... Maj Walter S. Osipoff

1st Parachute Battalion

CO..... Maj Richard Fagan

2d Parachute Battalion
(1Sep–10Oct43)

CO..... LtCol Victor H. Krulak

3d Parachute Battalion

CO..... Maj Robert T. Vance

Headquarters, 1st Marine Raider Regiment
(5Jul–28Aug43)

CO..... Col Harry B. Liversedge
ExO..... (None shown for the period)
R–3..... LtCol Joseph P. McCaffery

1st Raider Battalion

CO..... LtCol Samuel B. Griffith, II

4th Raider Battalion
(21Jun–11Jul; 18Jul–28Aug43)

CO..... LtCol Michael S. Currin

4th Defense Battalion
(15Aug–16Oct43)

CO..... Col Harold S. Fassett

9th Defense Battalion
(20Jun–31Aug43)

CO..... LtCol William J. Scheyer

C. TREASURY-BOUGAINVILLE OPERATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF NORTHERN SOLOMONS (28 October 1943–15 June 1944) [3]

I Marine Amphibious Corps
(1–21Dec43)

CG..... MajGen Roy S. Geiger

[1] Unless otherwise noted, names, positions held, organization titles, and periods of service were taken from the muster rolls of the units concerned, held in the Diary Unit, Files Section, Records Branch, Personnel Department, Headquarters Marine Corps. Units are listed only for those periods, indicated by the dates below parent unit designation, for which they are entitled to campaign participation credit. This information is derived from muster rolls and U.S. Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual*—NAVPERS 15,790 (Rev. 1953) with changes (Washington, 1953–1958). The muster rolls have been the final authority when there is a conflict in dates of unit entitlement within the overall campaign period as cited by the Awards Manual. In the case of Marine air units, many of which participated in the campaigns as flight or advance echelons only, the unit commander who was actually in the combat area is shown where muster rolls reveal this information. In order to conserve space, only units of battalion and squadron size, or larger, and sizeable separate detachments are listed for each operation, although smaller organizations may have participated also.

[2] Includes: New Georgia-Rendova-Vangunu Occupation, 20 Jun–31Aug43; Vella Lavella Occupation, 15Aug–16Oct43.

[3] Includes Choiseul Island Diversion, 28Oct–4Nov43; Occupation and Defense of Cape Torokina, 1Nov–15Dec43; Consolidation of Northern Solomons, 15Dec43–15Jun44.

CofS_____ BGen Alfred H. Noble (to 18 Dec43)
BGen Oscar R. Cauldwell (from 18Dec)
C–1_____ LtCol Joseph D. Burger
C–2_____ LtCol William F. Coleman
C–3_____ LtCol Edward W. Snedeker
C–4_____ LtCol Frederick L. Wieseman

2d 155mm Artillery Battalion (Provisional)

(18Nov–21Dec43)
CO_____ LtCol Joe C. McHaney

Corps Transportation Company, 1st Corps Motor Transport Battalion

(8Nov–25Dec43)
CO_____ Maj Franklin H. Hayner

1st Corps Signal Battalion

(6Nov–21Dec43)
CO_____ LtCol Frederick A. Ramsey, Jr.

Headquarters, 1st Marine Parachute Regiment

(4Dec43–12Jan44)
CO_____ LtCol Robert H. Williams
ExO_____ Maj Jackson B. Butterfield (actg)
R–3_____ Maj Walter S. Osipoff

1st Parachute Battalion

(23Nov43–12Jan44)
CO_____ Maj Richard Fagan (to 11Jan44)
Maj Robert C. McDonough (from 11Jan)

2d Parachute Battalion

(28Oct–4Nov43)
CO_____ LtCol Victor H. Krulak

3d Parachute Battalion

CO_____ Maj Robert T. Vance (to 10Dec43)
Maj Harry L. Torgerson (from 10Dec)

2d Marine Raider Regiment (Provisional)

(1Nov43-12Jan44)
CO_____ LtCol Alan Shapley
ExO_____ LtCol Joseph W. McCaffery (KIA 1Nov)
Capt Oscar F. Peatross (from 1Nov)
R–3_____ Capt Oscar F. Peatross

2d Raider Battalion

CO_____ Maj Richard T. Washburn (from 1Nov)

3d Raider Battalion

CO_____ LtCol Fred D. Beans

3d Defense Battalion

(1Nov43–21Jun44)
CO_____ LtCol Edward H. Forney

Branch No. 3, 4th Base Depot

(1Nov43–16Jan44)
CO_____ Col Kenneth A. Inman

3d Marine Division

(1Nov–21Dec43)
CG_____ MajGen Allen H. Turnage
ADC_____ BGen Oscar R. Cauldwell
CofS_____ Col Robert E. Blake
D–1_____ LtCol Chevey S. White
D–2_____ LtCol Howard J. Turton
D–3_____ LtCol James D. Snedeker (to 12Nov43)
Col Walter A. Wachtler (12Nov–16Dec)
LtCol Alpha L. Bowser (from 17Dec)
D–4_____ Col William C. Hall

Division Headquarters and Service Battalion

CO_____ LtCol Samuel D. Puller (to 14Nov43)
(None shown for 14Nov)
LtCol Hartnoll D. Withers (15–30Nov)
LtCol Samuel D. Puller (1–16Dec)
(None indicated after 16Dec)

Division Special and Service Troops

CO_____ Col Walter A. Wachtler (to 12Nov43)
LtCol James D. Snedeker (12–14Nov)
LtCol Hartnoll D. Withers (15Nov–9Dec)
(None shown for 10Dec)
LtCol James M. Smith (from 11Dec)

3d Amphibian Tractor Battalion

CO_____ Maj Sylvester L. Stephan (to 5Dec43; 8–9Dec; from 17Dec)
Maj Ervin F. Wann (6–7Dec; 10–16Dec)

3d Medical Battalion

(1Nov–25Dec43)
Co_____ Cdr Gordon M. Bruce (MC)

3d Motor Transport Battalion

(1Nov–25Dec43)

CO—— Maj Stewart W. Purdy

3d Service Battalion

CO—— LtCol Ion M. Bethel

3d Special Weapons Battalion

(17Nov–25Dec43)

CO—— LtCol Durant S. Buchanan

3d Tank Battalion

(1Nov–25Dec43)

CO—— LtCol Hartnoll J. Withers (to 15Nov43; from 10Dec)
(None shown for period 16Nov-9Dec)

3d Marines

(1Nov–25Dec43)

CO—— Col George W. McHenry (to 17 Dec43)
Col Walter A. Wachtler (from 17 Dec)
ExO—— LtCol George O. Van Orden
R–3—— Maj Sidney S. McMath (to 21Dec)
(None shown from 22Dec)

1st Battalion, 3d Marines

CO—— Maj Leonard M. Mason (WIA 1Nov43)
Maj John D. Brody (2–18Nov)
Maj Charles J. Bailey, Jr. (from 19Nov)

2d Battalion, 3d Marines

CO—— LtCol Hector de Zayas

3d Battalion, 3d Marines

CO—— LtCol Ralph M. King

9th Marines

(1Nov–28Dec43)

CO—— Col Edward A. Craig
ExO—— LtCol James A. Stuart
R–3—— LtCol Ralph L. Houser

1st Battalion, 9th Marines

CO—— LtCol Jaime Sabater (to 19Nov43)
LtCol Carey A. Randall (from 19 Nov)

2d Battalion, 9th Marines

CO—— LtCol Robert E. Cushman, Jr.

3d Battalion, 9th Marines

CO—— LtCol Walter Asmuth, Jr.

12th Marines

(1Nov43–1Jan44)

CO—— Col John B. Wilson
ExO—— LtCol John S. Letcher
R–3—— LtCol William T. Fairbourn

1st Battalion, 12th Marines

CO—— LtCol Raymond F. Crist, Jr.

2d Battalion, 12th Marines

(6Nov43–1Jan44)

CO—— LtCol Donald M. Weller

3d Battalion, 12th Marines

CO—— LtCol Jack Tabor

4th Battalion, 12th Marines

CO—— LtCol Bernard H. Kirk

19th Marines

(1Nov43–1Jan44)

CO—— Col Robert M. Montague (to 7Dec43)
LtCol Robert E. Fojt (from 7Dec)
ExO—— LtCol Robert E. Fojt (to 7Dec)
Maj William V. D. Jewett (from 7Dec)
R–3—— Capt Minetree Folkes, Jr.

1st Battalion, 19th Marines (Engineers)

CO—— Maj Ralph W. Bohne

2d Battalion, 19th Marines (Pioneers)

CO—— LtCol Harold B. West (to 7Dec43)
Maj Halstead Ellison (from 7Dec)

21st Marines

(6Nov43–9Jan44)

CO—— Col Evans O. Ames
ExO—— LtCol Arthur H. Butler
R–3—— Maj James W. Tinsley

1st Battalion, 21st Marines

CO—— LtCol Ernest W. Fry, Jr.

2d Battalion, 21st Marines

CO—— LtCol Eustace R. Smoak

3d Battalion, 21st Marines

(17Nov43–9Jan44)

CO—— LtCol Archie V. Gerard

D. NEW BRITAIN CAMPAIGN AND TALASEA OPERATION (26 December 1943–25 April 1944) [4]

[4] Includes: Cape Gloucester landing and operations, 26Dec43–1Mar44; Talasea landing and operations, 5Mar–25Apr44.

Headquarters, 1st Marine Division

(26Dec43–1Mar44)

CG_____ MajGen William H. Rupertus
ADC_____ BGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.
CofS_____ Col Amor L. Sims (to 4Feb44)
Col Oliver P. Smith (4–29Feb)
Col John T. Selden (from 1Mar)
D–1_____ Maj Elmer W. Myers
D–2_____ LtCol Edmund J. Buckley (to 24Feb44)
Col Harold D. Harris (from 24Feb)
D–3_____ Col Edwin A. Pollock (to 30Jan44)
LtCol William K. Enright (from 30Jan)
D–4_____ Col William S. Fellers

Assistant Division Commander Group (to February 1944)

ADC_____ BGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.
CofS_____ Col Herman H. Hanneken
ADC–2____ Capt Gene E. Gregg
ADC–3____ Maj John S. Day
ADC–4____ Capt Robert T. Crawford

Division Headquarters and Service Battalion

(1Jan–1Mar44)

CO_____ LtCol Frank R. Worthington

Division Special Troops

CO_____ Col Herman H. Hanneken
(None shown after 20Feb44)

Provisional Air Liaison Unit [5]

CO_____ Capt James Harris
IstLt Richard M. Hunt

1st Tank Battalion

CO_____ LtCol Charles G. Meints

1st Medical Battalion

CO_____ Capt Everett B. Keck (MC) (to 28Feb44)
Cdr Stanley P. Wallin (MC) (from 28Feb)

1st Marines

CO_____ Col William J. Whaling, Jr. (to 29Feb44)
Col Lewis B. Puller (from 29Feb)
ExO_____ LtCol Harold D. Harris (to 24Feb-44)
(None shown after 24Feb)
R–3_____ Maj Martin F. Rockmore (to 7Jan44)
Capt John N. Rentz [6] (7–20Jan)
Capt Arthur Larson (from 21Jan)

1st Battalion, 1st Marines

CO_____ LtCol Walker A. Reaves

2d Battalion, 1st Marines

CO_____ LtCol James M. Masters, Jr. (to 10Feb44)
Maj Charles H. Brush, Jr. (from 10Feb)

3d Battalion, 1st Marines

CO_____ LtCol Joseph F. Hankins

5th Marines

(29Dec43–1Mar44; 5Mar–25Apr44)

CO_____ Col John T. Selden (to 29Feb44)
Col Oliver P. Smith (1Mar–9Apr)
LtCol Henry W. Buse, Jr. (from 10Apr)
ExO_____ LtCol William K. Enright (to 6Jan44)
LtCol Lewis W. Walt (6–8Jan)
Maj Harry S. Connor (9–12Jan)
LtCol Lewis W. Walt (13–31Jan)
(None shown for 1–8Feb)
LtCol. Odell M. Conoley (9–20Feb)
LtCol Henry W. Buse, Jr. (21Feb–9Apr)
Maj Harry S. Connor (from 10Apr)
R–3_____ Maj Gordon D. Gayle (to 6Jan44)
Maj Harry S. Connor (from 6Jan)

1st Battalion, 5th Marines

CO_____ LtCol William H. Barba

2d Battalion, 5th Marines

CO_____ LtCol Lewis W. Walt (to 6Jan44)
Maj Gordon D. Gayle (from 6Jan)

3d Battalion, 5th Marines

(30Dec43–1Mar44; 5Mar–25Apr44)

CO_____ LtCol David S. McDougal (WIA 7Jan44).

[5] This unit did not have an official T/O nor was it listed in the division's muster rolls. It existed, however. The only mention made anywhere of its commanding officers is to be found in Captain Richard M. Hunt, "General Rupertus' Improvised Air Force," *Marine Corps Gazette*, v. 33, no. 6 (Jun49), although the inclusive dates of command and relief are not indicated.

[6] No R–3 is shown in the muster rolls for the period 7–20Jan. Capt Rentz, who was Assistant R–3 at this time, was on active duty at HQMC when Hough and Crown's *New Britain Campaign* was written and has been listed as the R–3 in that monograph.

CO_____ Maj Joseph S. Skoczylas (WIA 7Jan).
LtCol Lewis B. Puller (7–8Jan)
LtCol Lewis W. Walt (9–12Jan)
LtCol Harold O. Deakin (13Jan–10Apr).
Maj Walter McIlhenny (from 11Apr)

7th Marines

CO_____ Col Julian N. Frisbie (to 22Feb44)
Col Herman H. Hanneken (from 22Feb).
ExO_____ LtCol Lewis B. Puller (to 23Feb44)
(None shown after 23Feb)
R–3_____ Maj Victor H. Streit

1st Battalion, 7th Marines

CO_____ LtCol John E. Weber

2d Battalion, 7th Marines

CO_____ LtCol Odell M. Conoley (to 8Feb44)
Maj Charles S. Nichols, Jr. (8–14Feb).
LtCol John W. Scott, Jr. (from 15Feb).

3d Battalion, 7th Marines

CO_____ LtCol William R. Williams (to 4Jan44).
LtCol Lewis B. Puller (4–5Jan)
LtCol Henry W. Buse, Jr. (6Jan–20 Feb).
Maj William J. Piper, Jr. (from 21 Feb).

11th Marines

CO_____ Col Robert H. Pepper (to 31Jan44)
Col William H. Harrison (from 31Jan)
ExO_____ LtCol Robert B. Luckey (to 15 Feb44)
(None shown for 15–16Feb)
LtCol Thomas B. Hughes (from 17Feb)
R–3_____ Maj Louis A. Ennis (to 16Feb44)
(None shown for 16–21Feb)
Maj Elliott Wilson (from 22Feb)

1st Battalion, 11th Marines

CO_____ LtCol Lewis J. Fields

2d Battalion, 11th Marines

(26Dec43–1Mar44; 5Mar–25Apr44)
CO_____ LtCol Noah P. Wood, Jr.

3d Battalion, 11th Marines

(19Feb–1Mar44)
CO_____ LtCol Forest C. Thompson

4th Battalion, 11th Marines

CO_____ LtCol Thomas B. Hughes (to 17Feb44)
LtCol Louis A. Ennis (from 17Feb)

5th Battalion, 11th Marines

(30Dec43–1Mar44)
CO_____ LtCol Charles M. Nees

17th Marines

CO_____ Col Harold E. Rosecrans (to 19Feb44)
Col Francis I. Fenton (from 19Feb)
ExO_____ LtCol Robert G. Ballance (from 22Feb)
(None shown prior to this date[7])
R–3_____ Maj John P. McGuinness (to 22Feb)
Maj Levi A. Smith, Jr. (from 22Feb)

1st Battalion, 17th Marines (Engineers)

CO_____ LtCol Henry H. Crockett

2d Battalion, 17th Marines (Pioneers)

CO_____ LtCol Robert G. Ballance[7] (to 22Feb44)
Maj Austin S. Igleheart, Jr. (from 22Feb)

12th Defense Battalion

CO_____ Col William H. Harrison (to 31 Jan44)
LtCol Merlyn D. Holmes (from 31Jan)

E. EMIRAU LANDING AND OCCUPATION
(20 March 1944–12 April 1944)

I Marine Amphibious Corps Task Group A[8]

(20Mar–12Apr44)
Force Commander___ BGen Alfred H. Noble
CofS_____ Col Gale T. Cummings
F–1_____ Maj Ormond R. Simpson
F–2_____ LtCol Sidney S. Wade
F–3_____ LtCol George O. Van Orden
F–4_____ LtCol Leonard M. Mason

[7] Although Lieutenant Colonel Ballance is shown in the muster rolls as the Commanding Officer, 2/17, he served as the regimental executive officer in the period 26Dec43–22Feb44. According to Ballance, Major Levi A. Smith, Jr., served as 2/17's commander during this same period. *Ballance ltr.*

[8] Extracted from Emirau Landing Force Journal (Emirau Area OpFiles A10–1, 2, 3, and 4, HistBr, HQMC).

4th Marines, Reinforced
(20Mar–12Apr44)

CO---------- LtCol Alan Shapley
ExO---------- LtCol Samuel D. Puller
R–3---------- Maj Orville V. Bergren

1st Battalion, 4th Marines

CO---------- LtCol Charles L. Banks

2d Battalion, 4th Marines

CO---------- Maj John S. Messer

3d Battalion, 4th Marines

CO---------- Maj Ira J. Irwin

4th Pack Howitzer Battalion
(20Mar–12Apr44)

CO---------- Maj Robert H. Armstrong

14th Defense Battalion
(20–25Mar44)

CO---------- LtCol William F. Parks

MARINE AIR UNITS

Headquarters and Detachments, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing

(A—9Feb–20Jun43; 22May44–15Mar45) [9]
(B—21Jun43–1May44)
(C—27Aug–15Dec43)

CG---------- MajGen Roy S. Geiger (to 20Apr43)
MajGen Ralph J. Mitchell (21Apr43–31Jan44)
MajGen James T. Moore (1Feb–14Jun)
MajGen Ralph J. Mitcheli (from 15Jun)

AWC---------- BGen James T. Moore (to 1Jul43)
BGen Claude A. Larkin (from 3Aug)

CofS---------- BGen Louis E. Woods (to 27May43)
BGen James T. Moore (28 May–1Sep)
Col Clayton C. Jerome (1Sep 43–31Jan44)
CofS---------- Col William L. McKittrick (1Feb–16Jun)
Col. Stanley E. Ridderhof (from 17Jun)

W–1---------- LtCol Thomas C. Ennis (to 21Oct43)
Col William B. Steiner 22Oct43–31Jan44)
Capt Howard H. Parker (1Feb–1Sep)
LtCol Carl L. Jolly (2Sep44–11Mar45)
Maj Walter N. Gibson (from 12Mar)

W–2---------- LtCol John C. Munn (to 26Mar43)
Capt David B. Decker (27 Mar–26Nov)
Capt Peter Folger (26Nov43–19Jun44)
Capt Frank E. Walter (20Jun 43 1Oct)
Capt William H. Powell (2Oct–9Dec)
Capt Harlow P. Rothert (from 10Dec)

W–3---------- Col Christian F. Schilt (to 19Mar43)
LtCol Joe A. Smoak (19 Mar–10Apr)
LtCol Paul A. Moret [10] (21 Apr–7Jun)
Col Marion A. Dawson (8Jun43–13Jan44)
Col William B. Steiner (14–31Jan)
Col Alexander W. Kreisler, Jr. (1Feb–15Aug)
Col Frank W. Schwable (16 Aug–31Oct)
Col Edward A. Montgomery (1Nov44–6Mar45)
Col Charles J. Schlapkohl (from 7Mar)

W–4---------- LtCol Albert D. Cooley (to 21Mar43)
(None shown for 21–31Mar)
Col Herbert B. Becker (31Mar 43–8Jun44)
Col Zebulon C. Hopkins (9Jun–25Sep)

[9] Under each unit listed there will appear a letter designation for each operation in which the unit participated, and dates of involvement. Following are the campaigns and dates of entitlement:

A. Consolidation of the Solomons---- 8Feb43–15Mar45
B. New Georgia Operation---------- 20Jun–16Oct43
C. Bismarck Archipelago Operation---- 25Jun43–1May44
D. Treasury-Bougainville Operation--- 27Oct–15Dec43

[10] Killed in plane crash 7Jun43.

W–4 ..... LtCol Otto E. Bartoe (from 26Sep)
CO, HqSqn–1 ... Capt Herman J. Jesse (to 15Feb43)
Capt Carlos Martinez (15Feb–20Aug)
Maj John T. Rooney (21Aug–9Oct)
LtCol Eugene B. Diboll (10 Oct–31Dec)
Maj Loren P. Kesler (1Jan–4Feb44)
Capt James C. White, Jr. (5Feb–19Jun)
Capt Walter E. Sallee (20Jun–12Sep)
Maj Walter N. Gibson (13 Sep–8Oct)
Capt Robert W. Baile (from 9Oct)

Headquarters and Forward Echelon, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing

(A—9Feb–20Apr; 29Jun–16Oct43)

CG ..... BGen Francis P. Mulcahy
CofS ..... Col Walter G. Farrell (to 25Aug43)
Col Elmer H. Salzman (from 25Aug)
W–1 ..... 1stLt Robert G. Coddington
W–2 ..... Col Elmer H. Salzman (to 25Aug43)
LtCol Etheridge C. Best (from 25Aug)
W–3 ..... LtCol William C. Lemly (to 25Apr43)
LtCol Etheridge C. Best (25 Apr–24Aug)
LtCol Eugene F. Syms (from 25Aug)
W–4 ..... LtCol Franklin G. Cowie
CO, HqSqn–2 ... Maj William K. Snyder

Forward Echelon, Marine Aircraft Group 14

(A—9Feb–3Apr43; 27Oct43–15Jan45)
(B—20Aug–16Oct43)

CO ..... Col William O. Brice (to 16Mar44)
LtCol Roger T. Carleson (16-Mar–25Sep)
Col Zebulon C. Hopkins (from 26Sep)
ExO ..... LtCol Perry O. Parmelee (to 17Dec43)
LtCol Joe A. Smoak (18Dec43–31Jan44)
LtCol Roger T. Carleson (1-Feb–15Mar)
Maj Floyd E. Beard, Jr. (16Mar–28Nov)
(None designated after 28Nov)
GruOpsO ..... Maj Clyde T. Mattison (to 14Jul43)
Maj Arthur R. Stacy (15Jul–26Nov)
(None shown for 27Nov)
Maj Floyd E. Beard, Jr. (28 Nov43–15Mar44)
Maj Walter J. Carr, Jr. (16 Mar–?Jun)
Maj Floyd E. Beard, Jr. (?Jun–28Nov)
(None designated after 28Nov)
CO, HqSqn–14 .. Capt Stanley M. Adams (to 25Nov43)
Capt Arnold Borden (25Nov43–5Jun44)
Maj Donald S. Bush (6Jun–7Dec)
Capt Robert M. Crooks (from 8Dec)
CO, SMS–14 .... Maj Arthur R. Stacy (to 13Jul43)
Maj Kenneth H. Black (13Jul–13Dec)
Capt Walter A. Johnson (14Dec43–2Oct44)
Capt Droel H. Looney (from 3Oct)

Marine Aircraft Group 21

(A—13Mar–20Jun43)

CO ..... LtCol Raymond E. Hopper (to 17May43)
LtCol Nathaniel S. Clifford (actg) (from 17May)
ExO ..... LtCol Nathaniel S. Clifford (to 17May)
(None shown after 17May)
GruOpsO ..... Capt Charles W. Somers, Jr. (to 10May43)
Maj Wilfred H. Stiles (10May–1Jun)
(None designated 2–9Jun)

GruOpsG---- Maj George F. Britt (from 10Jun)
CO, HqSqn-21-- Maj Joseph T. Cain
CO, SMS-21---- LtCol Robert M. Haynes (to 12May43)
Maj Douglas J. Peacher (from 12May)

Forward Echelon, Marine Aircraft Group 24

(D—15Dec43)
(A—16Dec43–30Apr44)

CO---- Col William L. McKittrick (to 20Feb44)
LtCol Lewis H. Delano, Jr. (from 20Feb)
ExO---- LtCol Roger T. Carleson (to 1Jan44)
LtCol Lewis H. Delano, Jr. (1Jan–19Feb)
LtCol Robert W. Clark (from 20Feb)
GruOpsO---- LtCol Lewis H. Delano, Jr. (to 19Feb)
Maj Max J. Volcansek, Jr. (19Feb–26Apr)
(None shown after 26Apr)
CO, HqSqn-24-- Capt Alan Limburg (actg) (to 26Jan44)
Maj Lawrence L. Jacobs (from 26Jan)
CO, SMS-24---- LtCol Robert W. Clark (to 20-Feb44)
Capt Watt S. Ober (from 20Feb)

Marine Aircraft Group 25

(A—9Feb–20Jun43; 27Oct43–15Mar45)
(B—21Jun–16Oct43)

CO---- Col Perry K. Smith (to 10 Jul43)
Col Wyman F. Marshall (10Jul-15Dec)
Col Allen C. Koonce (16–31-Dec)
Col William A. Willis (1Jan–24Jul44)
Col Allen C. Koonce (25Jul44–12Feb45)
Col Harold C. Major (from 13Feb)
ExO---- Col Wyman F. Marshall (to 14Feb43)
ExO---- LtCol Elmore W. Seeds (14 Feb–31May)
LtCol William K. Lanman, Jr. (1–3Jun)
LtCol Federick E. Leek (4Jun–20Aug)
Col William A. Willis (21Aug–27Sep)
LtCol John P. Coursey (28Sep–14Nov)
(None shown 15–24Nov)
LtCol William H. Klenke, Jr. (25Nov44–9Feb45)
Col Warren E. Sweetser, Jr. (from 10Feb)
GruOpsO---- Col Wyman F. Marshall (to 5Apr43)
LtCol Harry F. Van Liew (5Apr–4Jul)
LtCol Elmore W. Seeds (5Jul–10Oct)
LtCol Harry F. Van Liew (11Oct43–2Aug44)
LtCol Harry H. Bullock (3Aug–26Sep)
LtCol Theodore W. Sanford, Jr. (27Sep44–4Mar45)
LtCol William H. Klenke, Jr. (from 5Mar)
CO, HqSqn-25-- Capt Dave J. Woodward, Jr. (to 9Sep43)
Maj Jonathan W. Dyer (9-Sep43–15Jan44)
Maj Thomas M. Heard (16-Jan–16Jun)
Capt LeRoy M. James (17-Jun–20Oct)
Maj Theodore E. Beal (21-Oct–9Nov)
Maj Charles J. Prall (from 10Nov)
CO, SMS-25---- Maj Ralph R. Yeamans (to 21May43)
Maj Jack A. Church (21May–15Jul)
Maj Ralph R. Yeamans (16-Jul–16Nov)
Maj Jack A. Church (17Nov-43–9Mar44)
LtCol Millard T. Shepard (10-Mar–13Nov)
LtCol Albert S. Munsch (from 14Nov)

Flight Echelon, Marine Aircraft Group 61
(A—18Jul44–15Mar45)

CO—Col Perry K. Smith
ExO—LtCol Frederick B. Winfree
GruOpsO—LtCol Stewart W. Ralston (to 17Aug44)
Maj Peter V. Metcalf (17Aug–8Nov)
LtCol Stewart W. Ralston (from 8Nov)
CO, HqSqn–61—Maj Peter V. Metcalf (to 17Aug44)
Capt Claude A. Wharton (from 17Aug)
CO, SMS–61—Maj Jack W. Julian (to 1Jan45)
LtCol Roswell B. Burchard, Jr. (from 1Jan)

Marine Fighter Squadron 112
(A—9Feb–20Jun43)

CO—Maj Paul J. Fontana (to 27Mar43)
Maj Robert B. Fraser (from 27Mar)

Marine Fighter Squadron 114
(C—28Mar–1May44)

CO—Maj Robert F. Stout

Marine Fighter Squadron 115
(C—19Apr–1May44)
(A—2May–30Nov44)

CO—Maj Joseph J. Foss (to 20Sep44)
Maj John H. King, Jr. (from 20Sep)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 121
(A—4Mar–20Jun43)
(B—21Jun–22Jul43)

CO—Maj Roy L. Vroome (to 14May43)
Capt Robert E. Bruce (from 14May)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 123
(A—9Feb–20Jun43)
(B—15Aug–18Sep43)

CO—Maj Edward W. Johnston (to 19Apr43)
Maj Richard M. Baker (from 19Apr)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 124
(A—12Feb–1Jun43)
(B—21Jun–6Sep43)

CO—Maj William E. Gise (MIA 13-May43)
Capt Cecil B. Brewer (13May 25Jun)
Maj William H. Pace (26Jun-13Jul)
LtCol William A. Millington (from 14Jul)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 131
(A—9Feb–2May43)

CO—Capt Jens C. Aggerbeck, Jr. (to 15Mar43)
Capt George E. Dooley (from 15Mar)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squardon 132
(A—8Feb–29Mar43)
(B—22Jun–1Aug43)

CO—Maj Louis B. Robertshaw (to 27May43)
Maj Russell D. Rupp (from 27-May)

Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 133
(A—24Aug–11Dec44)

CO—Maj Lee A. Christoffersen

Flight Echelon, Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 134
(D—26Nov–27Dec43)
(C—17Feb–1May44)

CO—LtCol Alben C. Robertson

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 141
(A—9Feb–19Jun43)
(B—20Jun–3Sep43)

CO—Capt Claude A. Carlson, Jr. (to 8Mar43)
1stLt Oscar J. Camp, Jr. (8 Mar–1Apr)
Maj Howard F. Bowker, Jr. (2Apr–14May)
Capt Middleton P. Barrow (15 May–25Aug)
1stLt John E. Lepke (from 26 Aug)

Flight Echelon, Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 142

(A—9Feb–26Apr44; 19Sep–19Dec44)

CO---------- Maj Robert H. Richard (to 9-Jun44)
Capt Hoyle R. Barr (from 18-Jul)

Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 143

(A—15Feb–20Jun43)

CO---------- Maj John W. Sapp, Jr. (to 14May43)
Capt Warren G. Mollenkamp (14May–7Jun)
MG Alvie D. Godwin (actg) (8–20Jun)

Ground Echelon, VMTB–143 [11]
(B—20Jul–29Aug43)
Capt Timothy A. Moynihan

Forward Echelon, VMTB–143
(D—27Oct–30Nov43)
(C—19Jan–3Mar44)
Capt Timothy A. Moynihan (to 13Nov43)
1stLt William O. Cain (13–28Nov)
Capt Henry W. Hise (from 29Nov)

Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 144

(A—9Feb–20Jun43)

CO---------- Capt Roscoe W. Nelson (to 20Apr43)
Maj Frank E. Hollar (from 20Apr)

Flight Echelon, VMTB–144
(B—21Jun–1Aug43)
(D—27Oct–22Nov43)

Maj Frank E. Hollar

Flight Echelon, Marine Utility Squadron 152

(A—9Feb–19Jun43; 4Aug44–15Mar45)
(B—20Jun–5Aug43)

CO---------- Maj Elmore W. Seeds (to 13Feb43)
Maj Dwight M. Guillotte (from 13Feb)
LtCol Albert W. Munsch (to 14Nov44)
LtCol John P. Coursey (from 14Nov)

[11] VMSB designation changed as of 31May43.

Detachment, Flight Echelon, Marine Utility Squadron 153

(A—8Apr–19Jun43; Jun44–15Mar45)
(B—20Jun–18Aug43)
(C—10–15Dec43)

CO---------- Maj William K. Lanman, Jr. (to 1Jun43)
LtCol Elmore W. Seeds (1Jun–4Jul)
Maj Robert B. Bell (5Jul–4Nov)
Maj Freeman W. Williams (5Nov43–22May44)
Maj Theodore W. Sanford, Jr. (23May–29Jul)
LtCol Harold F. Brown (from 30Jul)

Detachment, Flight Echelon, Marine Photographic Squadron 154

(A—9Feb–20Jun43)
(B—21Jun–16Oct43)

CO---------- LtCol Elliot E. Bard

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 211

(D—17Oct–22Nov43)
(C—30Dec43–1Feb44)
(A—2Jun–30Nov44)

CO---------- Maj Robert A. Harvey (to 26Jan44)
Maj Thomas V. Murto, Jr. (26Jan–5May)
Maj Thaddeus P. Wojcik (6May–18Oct)
Maj Stanislaus J. Witomski (from 19Oct)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 212

(D—27Oct–27Nov43)
(C—7Jan–17Feb; 19Feb–30Apr44)
(A—7Jun–8Dec44)

CO---------- Maj Stewart B. O'Neil (to 32Dec43)
Maj Hugh M. Elwood (1Jan–23Apr44)
Maj Wilbur A. Free (24Apr–8May)
Maj Boyd C. McElhany, Jr. (9May–18Nov)
Maj Quinton R. Johns (from 18Nov)

Marine Fighter Squadron 213
(A—3Apr–20Jun43)

CO..... Maj Wade H. Britt, Jr. (to 13Apr43)
Flight Echelon, VMF–213
(B—21Jun–29Jul; 5Sep–16Oct43)
Maj Gregory J. Weissenberger (13Apr–22Aug43)
Maj James R. Anderson (from 22Aug)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 214
(A—10Mar–14May43)
(B—22Jul–2Sep43)
(C—14Sep–20Oct43)
(D—28Nov–15Dec43)
(C—16Dec43–6Jan44)

CO..... Maj George F. Britt (to 9Jun43)
Maj Henry A. Ellis, Jr. (9Jun–11Jul)
Maj William H. Pace (12Jul–7Aug)
Capt John R. Burnett (8Aug–6Sep)
Maj Gregory Boyington (7Sep-43–3Jan44, MIA)
Capt Lawrence H. Howe (from 4Jan)

Marine Fighter Squadron 215
(B—25Jul–6Sep43)

CO..... Maj James L. Neefus (to 30Sep44)
Ground Echelon, VMF–215
(D—27Oct–27Nov43)
LtCol Herbert H. Williamson
Flight Echelon, VMF–215
(A—7Jan–7May44)
(C—22Apr–1May44)
Maj Robert G. Owens, Jr. (to 28Feb44)
Maj James K. Dill (from 28Feb)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 216
(D—23Nov–15Dec43)
(C—5Feb–28Mar44)

CO..... Maj Rivers J. Morrell, Jr. (to 22Jan44)
Maj Benjamin S. Hargrave, Jr. (from 22Jan)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 217
(A—28Jan–17Mar44)
(C—28Jan–17Mar44)

CO..... Maj Max R. Read, Jr.

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 218
(C—3Feb–16Mar44)
(A—30Apr–6Jun; 23Jul–30Nov44)

CO..... Maj Horace A. Pehl (to 28-Sep44)
Maj Robert T. Kingsbury (from 28Sep)

Marine Fighter Squadron 221
(A—17Mar–10May43)
(B—27Jun–24Aug43)
(D—27Oct–19Nov43)

CO..... Capt Robert R. Burns (to 1Jun43)
Maj Monfurd K. Peyton (1-Jun–16Aug)
Capt John S. Payne (17–24Aug)
Maj Nathan T. Post, Jr. (25-Aug–11Oct)
Maj Edwin S. Roberts, Jr. (from 12Oct)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 222
(B—5Sep–15Oct43)
(D—19Nov–15Dec43)
(C—16–23Dec43)
(A—3Feb–19Mar; 8May–16Jun; 5Aug–8Dec44)

CO..... Capt Max J. Volcansek, Jr. (to 5Nov43)
Maj Alfred N. Gordon (5Nov-43–4Apr44)
Maj Roy T. Spurlock (from 5Apr)

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 223
(D—28Nov–15Dec43)
(C—16Dec43–8Jan44)

CO..... Maj Marion E. Carl
VMF–223
(A—17Feb44–11Jan45)
Maj Robert P. Keller (to 3-Jul44)
Maj David Drucker (3Jul–13Oct)
Maj Robert F. Flaherty (from 14Oct)

Flight Echelon, Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 232

(B—23Sep–16Oct43)
(D—27Oct–15Dec43)
(C—20Jan–1May44)
(A—2May–19Jun44)

CO---------- Maj Rolland F. Smith (to 26Apr44)
Maj Menard Doswell III (from 26Apr)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 233 [12]

(A—13Mar–5Apr43)
(B—13Aug–21Sep43)
(D—2Nov–11Dec43)
(C—3Jan–10Mar44)

CO---------- Capt Elmer L. Gilbert, Jr. (to 1May43)
Maj Claude J. Carlson, Jr. (1–25May)
Maj William J. O'Neill (26May–3Sep)
Maj Royce W. Coln (from 4Sep)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 234

(A—9–28Feb; 12Apr–20Sep43)
(B—4Aug–7Sep43)

CO---------- Maj William D. Roberson (to 5Apr43)
Maj Otis V. Calhoun, Jr. (5Apr–30Sep)

Detachment, Flight Echelon, VMSB–234

(D—27Oct–25Nov43)
Maj Harold B. Penne (1–26Oct)
Capt Edward J. Montagne, Jr. (from 27Oct)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 235

(B—4Sep–16Oct43)
(D—27Nov–15Dec43)
(C—16–31Dec43)

(A—23Mar–6May; 8Jun–13Sep44)
CO---------- Capt Everett E. Munn (to 10Feb44)
Maj Glenn L. Todd (10Feb–17May) [13]
Capt Edward C. Willard (18May–15Aug)
Maj James A. Feeley, Jr. (from 16Aug)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 236

(B—7Sep–16Oct43)
(D—27Nov–15Dec43)
(C—16Dec43–7Feb44)
(A—28Apr–6Jun; 1 Aug–22Nov44)
CO---------- Maj Floyd E. Beard, Jr. (to 10Nov43)
Maj William A. Cloman, Jr. (10Nov43–12Jun44)
Maj Edward R. Polgrean (13Jun–13Oct)
Capt Glen H. Schluckbier (14–30Oct)
Maj James A. Feeley, Jr. (from 31Oct)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 241

(C—9Feb–17Mar44)
(A—4May–11Jun; 31Jul–20Sep44)
CO---------- Maj James A. Feeley, Jr. (to 12Aug44)
Maj James C. Lindsay (from 12Aug)

Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 242

(C—29Feb–25Apr44)
CO---------- Maj William W. Dean

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 243

(D—20Nov–15Dec43)
(A—16–27Dec43; 16Jun–23Dec44)
(C—17Mar–27Apr44)
CO---------- Maj Thomas J. Ahern (to 3Oct44)
Maj Joseph W. Kean, Jr. (from 13Oct)

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 244

(B—18Oct–29Nov43)
(C—10Feb–22Mar44)
(A—17May–24Jun; 31Jul–13Nov44)
CO---------- Maj Robert J. Johnson (to 25Jan44)

[12] VMSB-233 was redesignated VMTB-233 on 22May43.

[13] Muster Rolls show him as CO until 17May, but departing for US 7May.

CO---------- Maj Harry W. Reed (25Jan–17Apr)
Capt Richard Belyea (18Apr–1Jul)
Maj Frank R. Porter, Jr. (from 2Jul)

Flight Echelon, Marine Observation Squadron 251
(A—9Feb–11May43; 18Jun–30Dec44)

CO---------- Maj Joseph N. Renner (to 13Mar43)
Capt Claude H. Welch (13-Mar–14May)
Maj Carl M. Longley (4Jun–31Oct)
Capt Robert W. Teller (1–5-Nov)
Maj William C. Humberd (from 6Nov)

Detachment, Flight Echelon, Marine Utility Squadron 253
(B—20Jun–31Aug43)

CO---------- LtCol Henry C. Lane

Flight Echelon, Marine Photographic Squadron 254
(A—12Dec43–30Sep44)

CO---------- Maj Edwin P. Pennebaker

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 313
(A—25Sep–30Nov44)

CO---------- Maj Joseph H. McGlothlin, Jr.

Flight Echelon, Marine Fighter Squadron 321
(C—5Dec43–27Jan44; 17Mar–24Apr44)

CO---------- Maj Edmund F. Overend

Flight Echelon, Marine Scout-Bomber Squadron 341
(C—1Jan–10Feb; 6Apr–1May44)
(A—2May–30Nov44)

CO---------- Maj George J. Waldie, Jr. (to 24Jan44)
Maj James T. McDaniels (24-Jan–19May)
Maj Walter D. Persons (20-May–14Aug)
Maj Christopher F. Irwin, Jr. (from 15Aug)

Ground Echelon, VMSB–341
(C—20Mar–1May44)
Maj James T. McDaniels

Flight Echelon, Marine Bomber Squadron 413
(C—15Mar–1May44)
(A—2May44–15Mar45)

CO---------- LtCol Andrew B. Galatian, Jr. (to 14Aug44)
LtCol Stewart W. Ralston (14Aug–7Nov)
LtCol Roswell B. Burchard, Jr. (8Nov44–1Jan45)
LtCol Robert B. Cox (from 2Jan)

Marine Bomber Squadron 423
(A—13May44–15Mar45)

CO---------- LtCol John L. Winston (to 19Jul44)
LtCol Norman J. Anderson (from 19Jul)

Marine Bomber Squadron 433
(A—21Jul44–15Mar45)

CO---------- Maj John G. Adams

Marine Bomber Squadron 443
(A—27Aug44–15Mar45)

CO---------- LtCol Dwight M. Guillotte

Advance Echelon, Marine Night-Fighter Squadron 531
(B—12Sep–16Oct43)

CO---------- Col Frank H. Schwable

Rear Echelon, VMF(N)–531
(B—10–16Oct43)
(D—27Oct–15Dec43)
(C—16Dec43–1May44)
(A—2May–15Jul44)

CO---------- Col Frank H. Schwable (to 18Feb44)
LtCol John D. Harshberger (18Feb–13May)
Capt James H. Wehmer (from 14May)

Marine Bomber Squadron 611
(C—15Dec43–1May44)

CO---------- LtCol George A. Sarles

Flight Echelon, VMB–611
(A—17Nov–23Dec44; 11Feb–9Mar45)
LtCol George A. Sarles

Marine Casualties [1]

Location and date	KIA		DOW		WIA		MIAPD		POW [2]		TOTAL	
	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted
Marines												
New Georgia [3] (20Jun–16Oct43)	8	145	0	10	31	384	1	57	0	0	40	596
Bougainville [4] (28Oct43–15Jun44)	18	334	7	81	77	1, 172	6	286	0	0	108	1, 873
Cape Gloucester (26Dec43–1Mar44)	19	245	1	49	40	775	0	124	0	0	60	1, 193
Talasea	2	10	0	16	8	125	0	9	0	0	10	160
Aviation [5]	92	104	1	15	108	114	232	339	17	5	452	577
Sea-duty	1	19	0	5	8	87	3	58	0	0	12	169
Miscellaneous [6]	0	1	1	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	6	2
Total Marines	140	858	10	176	277	2, 658	242	873	17	5	688	4, 570
Naval Medical Personnel Organic to Marine Units [1]												
New Georgia	0	3	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	14
Bougainville	1	8	1	2	1	29	0	0	0	0	2	39
Cape Gloucester	1	8	1	2	1	29	0	0	0	0	2	39
Talasea	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Marine Aviation	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	4
Total Navy	2	21	1	4	2	86	0	0	0	0	5	111
Grand Total	142	879	11	180	279	2, 744	242	287	17	5	693	4, 681

[1] These final Marine casualty figures were compiled from records furnished by Statistics Unit, Personnel Accounting Section, Records Branch, Personnel Department, HQMC. They are audited to include 26 August 1952. Naval casualties were taken from NavMed P-5021, *The History of the Medical Department of the Navy in World War II*, 2 vols (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1953), II, pp. 1-84. The key to the abbreviations used at the head of columns in the table follows: KIA, Killed in Action; DOW, Died of Wounds; WIA, Wounded in Action; MIAPD, Missing in Action, Presumed Dead; POW, Prisoner of War. Because of the casualty reporting method used during World War II, a substantial number of DOW figures are also included in the WIA column.

[2] Included are 4 officers who died while POWs, and 2 who escaped.

[3] Includes: Rendova, Arundel, Vella Lavella, Enogai, and Vangunu operations.

[4] Includes: Choiseul operation and consolidation of Northern Solomons.

[5] Includes: All operations in Solomons-New Britain area during period 9Feb43-15Mar45.

[6] Includes: Arawe, Russell Islands, and Treasury Islands operations.

Unit Commendations

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to the

MARINE FIGHTING SQUADRON TWO HUNDRED FOURTEEN

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces at Guadalcanal, April 7, 1943; Munda, July 17 to August 30, 1943; Northern Solomons, September 16 to October 19, 1943; and Vella Lavella and Torokina, December 17, 1943, to January 6, 1944. The first squadron to strafe Kahili, the first to operate from Munda while the field was under heavy enemy artillery fire, and the first to lead a fighter sweep on Rabaul, Marine Fighting Squadron TWO HUNDRED FOURTEEN executed bomber escort missions, strafing attacks, search sweeps and patrol missions. Superbly serviced and maintained by its ground crews despite enemy shellfire and nightly bombing attacks, this unit destroyed or damaged 273 Japanese aircraft during these campaigns and, in some of the most bitterly contested air combats on record, contributed substantially to the establishment of an aerial beachhead over Rabaul and paved the way for Allied bombers to destroy Japanese shipping, supply dumps and shore installations. Frequently outnumbered but never outfought, Marine Fighting Squadron TWO HUNDRED FOURTEEN achieved an outstanding combat record which reflects the highest credit upon its skilled pilots, air and ground crews and the United States Naval Service."

For the President.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

SOUTH PACIFIC COMBAT AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND

consisting of

Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY FIVE
Marine Headquarters Squadron TWENTY FIVE
Marine Service Squadron TWENTY FIVE
Marine Transport Squadron ONE HUNDRED FIFTY TWO
Marine Transport Squadron ONE HUNDRED FIFTY THREE
Marine Transport Squadron TWO HUNDRED FIFTY THREE
403rd Troop Carrier Group and the 801st Evacuation Hospital of the Thirteenth Troop Carrier Squadron, United States Army Forces

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in support of military operations in the forward areas of the South Pacific from December 10, 1942, to July 15, 1944. Flying unarmed, land-based planes without escort despite dangers from Japanese land, sea and air forces, treacherous tropical storms and mechanical failures at sea far from base, the South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command delivered bombs, ammunition, gasoline and vital supplies to combat troops in close and direct contact with the enemy. Frequently taken under fire by hostile antiaircraft guns and fighters while airborne, and by Japanese artillery and Naval gunfire while on the ground at advanced fields, the pilots, aircrewmen and ground echelons served with courage, skill and daring in maintaining uninterrupted support of our forces in the forward areas and contributed essentially to the rout of the Japanese from strategically important bases in the South Pacific. This gallant record of achievement reflects the highest credit upon the South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command and the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command from December 10, 1942, to July 15, 1944, are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

MARINE FIGHTING SQUADRON TWO HUNDRED TWENTY ONE

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands Area from March 17 to November 17, 1943. Operating with courage and determination in the face of adverse weather, difficult living conditions and inadequate equipment, Marine Fighting Squadron TWO HUNDRED TWENTY ONE carried out daily effective strikes against Munda Airfield and the Kahili Area, in addition to participating in major defensive operations against superior Japanese forces over the Russell Islands and repulsing an attack on our surface vessels in the waters surrounding Tulagi. Relentless in seeking out the enemy, these fighter pilots intercepted a large striking force of Japanese twin-engined bombers attempting to attack our landing forces in Blanche Channel, blasted sixteen of the hostile bombers from the sky and contributed in large measure to the complete annihilation of the striking force and to the success of the Rendova operation. The first squadron to operate from the advanced base at Vella Lavella, Marine Fighting Squadron TWO HUNDRED TWENTY ONE fiercely countered the enemy's aerial attacks and, by completely destroying an entire Japanese squadron refueling on Kara Airfield, aided materially in insuring the success of landings on Treasury Island and Bougainville, at Empress Augusta Bay. By their constant vigilance, aggressiveness and devotion to duty in the face of grave peril, the pilots and crews of this gallant squadron were instrumental in denying to the enemy the strategic Solomon Islands Area, achieving a distinguished combat record in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with Marine Fighting Squadron TWO HUNDRED TWENTY ONE during the period from March 17 to November 17, 1943, are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending

MARINE FIGHTING SQUADRON TWO FIFTEEN

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands and Bismarck Archipelago Areas from July 24, 1943, to February 15, 1944. Undaunted in the face of hostile fighter opposition and intense antiaircraft fire, Marine Fighter Squadron TWO FIFTEEN carried out numerous patrols and fighter sweeps and escorted many bombing attacks against Japanese shipping, airfields and shore installations. Individually heroic and aggressive, the gallant pilots of this fighting squadron shot down 137 enemy planes, probably destroyed 45 others and accounted for 27 on the ground, an exceptional combat record attesting the superb teamwork of the daring flight echelon and the resourceful, tireless and skilled ground echelon which serviced and maintained the planes despite daily hostile shellfire and nightly bombing attacks. The destruction and damage inflicted on the enemy by Marine Fighting Squadron TWO FIFTEEN contributed substantially to the successful completion of the New Georgia, Bougainville and Rabaul Campaigns and reflect the highest credit upon the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to the flight and ground echelons of Marine Fighting Squadron TWO FIFTEEN are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

THIRD MARINES, THIRD MARINE DIVISION

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces during the invasion, seizure, occupation and defense of Empress Augusta Bay Beachhead, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, from November 1 to December 22, 1943. In action against the enemy for the first time, the THIRD Marines landed on an extremely wide front in the face of perilous surf and beach conditions and through flanking fire of hostile machine guns, anti-boat guns, mortars, small arms and artillery from heavily entrenched positions on Cape Torokina and Puruata Island. Pressing forward through almost impenetrable jungle and swampy terrain, this Regiment completely reduced the intricate system of mutually supporting Japanese pillboxes, bunkers, fire trenches and foxholes which constituted the Cape Torokina defense, and secured its portion of the objective by evening of D-Day. Shifted to the left flank of the beachhead, the THIRD Marines smashed a Japanese counter-landing and drove steadily forward despite difficulties of terrain, supply and communication and, developing the main enemy position in a meeting engagement on the Numa Numa Trail, completely wiped out the Japanese 23rd Infantry. In continuous action as a front line regiment for a total of fifty-two consecutive days, the gallant men and officers of the THIRD Marines, by their skill in jungle warfare and their aggressive fighting spirit, contributed greatly to the success of the campaign and enhanced the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the THIRD Marines at Bougainville from November 1 to December 22, 1943, are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

TWELFTH MARINES, THIRD MARINE DIVISION

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Empress Augusta Bay Beachhead, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, from November 1, 1943, to January 12, 1944; and in the invasion and seizure of Guam, Marianas, July 21 to August 10, 1944. Divided for landing into small elements dispersed over 5000 yards of beach at Empress Augusta Bay, the TWELFTH Marines overcame perilous surf and beach conditions and an almost impenetrable wall of jungle and swampy terrain to land their pack howitzers, initial ammunition and equipment by hand, to occupy firing positions, emplace guns, set up all control facilities and deliver effective fire in support of the THIRD Marine Division beachhead by afternoon of D-Day. In action for 73 days while under continual Japanese air attacks, the TWELFTH Marines aided in smashing an enemy counterattack on November 7–8, silenced all hostile fire in the Battle of Cocoanut Grove on November 13, and delivered continuous effective fire in defense of the vital beachhead position. At Guam, they landed in the face of enemy mortar and artillery fire through treacherous surf and, despite extreme difficulties of communication, supply and transportation, and the necessity of shifting from one type of fire to another, rendered valuable fire support in night and day harassing fires, counterbattery fires and defensive barrages, including the disruption of an organized counterattack by seven Japanese battalions on the night of July 26–27. By their individual heroic actions and their skilled teamwork, the officers and men of the TWELFTH Marines served with courage and distinction during the THIRD Marine Division's missions to secure the Empress Augusta Bay Beachhead and to aid in the recapture of Guam, thereby enhancing the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the TWELFTH Marines during these periods are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

III AMPHIBIOUS CORPS SIGNAL BATTALION

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For extremely meritorious service in support of military operations, while attached to the I Marine Amphibious Corps during the amphibious assault on Bougainville, and attached to the III Amphibious Corps during operations at Guam, Palau and Okinawa, during the period from November 1, 1943, to June 21, 1945. The first American Signal Battalion to engage in amphibious landings in the Pacific Ocean Areas, the III Amphibious Corps Signal Battalion pioneered and developed techniques and procedures without benefit of established precedent, operating with limited and inadequate equipment, particularly in the earlier phase of these offensive actions, and providing its own security while participating in jungle fighting, atoll invasions and occupation of large island masses. Becoming rapidly experienced in guerrilla warfare and the handling of swiftly changing situations, this valiant group of men successfully surmounted the most difficult conditions of terrain and weather as well as unfamiliar technical problems and, working tirelessly without consideration for safety, comfort or convenience, provided the Corps with uninterrupted ship-shore and bivouac communication service continuously throughout this period. This splendid record of achievement, made possible only by the combined efforts, loyalty and courageous devotion to duty of each individual, was a decisive factor in the success of the hazardous Bougainville, Guam, Palau and Okinawa Campaigns and reflects the highest credit upon the III Amphibious Corps Signal Battalion and the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to the III Amphibious Corps Signal Battalion who actually participated in one or more of the Bougainville, Guam, Palau and Okinawa operations are hereby authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JAMES FORRESTAL,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

NINTH MARINE DEFENSE BATTALION

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces at Guadalcanal, November 30, 1942, to May 20, 1943; Rendova-New Georgia Area, June 30 to November 7, 1943; and at Guam, Marianas, July 21 to August 20, 1944. One of the first units of its kind to operate in the South Pacific Area, the NINTH Defense Battalion established strong seacoast and beach positions which destroyed 12 hostile planes attempting to bomb Guadalcanal, and further engaged in extensive patrolling activities. In a 21-day-and-night training period prior to the Rendova-New Georgia assault, this group calibrated and learned to handle new weapons and readily effected the conversion from a seacoast unit to a unit capable of executing field artillery missions. Joining Army Artillery units, special groups of this battalion aided in launching an attack which drove the enemy from the beaches, downed 13 of a 16-bomber plane formation during the first night ashore and denied the use of the Munda airfield to the Japanese. The NINTH Defense Battalion aided in spearheading the attack of the Army Corps operating on New Georgia and, despite heavy losses, remained in action until the enemy was routed from the island. Elements of the Battalion landed at Guam under intense fire, established beach defenses, installed antiaircraft guns and later, contributed to the rescue of civilians and to the capture or destruction of thousands of Japanese. By their skill, courage and aggressive fighting spirit, the officers and men of the NINTH Defense Battalion upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the NINTH Defense Battalion during the above-mentioned periods are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN,
Secretary of the Navy.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,
Washington.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the

ELEVENTH MARINE REGIMENT

for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism while serving with the FIRST Marine Division in action against enemy Japanese forces at Cape Gloucester, New Britain, from December 26, 1943, to April 30, 1944. Tortured by tropical insects, torrential rain and never-ending sniper fire, the Eleventh Marine Regiment slashed through dense jungle and through mud which mired artillery pieces and prevented movement except by man-handling. Refusing to be stopped by any and all obstacles, officers and men worked as an indomitable team under raking enemy fire, fighting their way over twisted, covered trails to provide heavy-weapons fire for the assault infantry troop. With fire from a half-ton field gun, they tore a swatch through the jungle screening a strategic ridge and, in the midst of hand-to-hand fighting with a stubbornly resisting enemy, inched forward up the 40-degree slope to place the field piece on the commanding crest. There they guarded it through the night against the fury of repeated banzai attacks until, in the rain-drenched blackness of early dawn, they stopped the charging Japanese with relentless artillery fire and insured the security of this dominating position. Their fortitude, determination and courageous fighting spirit in the face of almost insurmountable odds throughout this campaign reflect the highest credit upon the Eleventh Marine Regiment and the United States Naval Service."

All personnel attached to and serving with the Eleventh Marines at Gloucester Bay from December 26, 1943, to April 30, 1944, are authorized to wear the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION Ribbon.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN,
Secretary of the Navy.

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RABAUL STRATEGIC AREA

SHOWING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE
SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA
ESTABLISHED 2 JULY 1942

0 25 50 75 100 125 150 175 200
STATUTE MILES

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA

SOUTH PACIFIC AREA

BISMARCK SEA

ST. MATTHIAS GROUP
MUSSAU
EMIRAU

ADMIRALTY ISLANDS
MANUS
LOS NEGROS

NEW HANOVER
Kavieng

TABAR ISLANDS
LIHIR ISLANDS
TANGA ISLANDS
FENI ISLANDS
GREEN ISLANDS

NEW IRELAND
Rabaul
ST. GEORGE'S CHANNEL

GAROVE

NEW BRITAIN
LONG
ROOKE
VITIAZ STRAIT
DAMPIER STRAIT
Borgen Bay

Nadzab
Lae
Finschhafen
Salamaua
HUON GULF

NEW GUINEA

TROBRIAND ISLANDS
KIRIWINA
Gona
Buna
Oro Bay
D'ENTRECASTEAUX ISLANDS
GOODENOUGH
FERGUSSON
NORMANBY
Port Moresby
Milne Bay
SAMARAI

CORAL SEA

SOLOMON SEA

WOODLARK

LOUISIADE ARCHIPELAGO
TAGULA

BUKA
BOUGAINVILLE
Kieta
Empress Augusta Bay
Buin
SHORTLAND
CHOISEUL
TREASURY ISLANDS
VELLA LAVELLA
NEW GEORGIA GROUP
NEW GEORGIA
KOLOMBANGARA
Munda
RENDOVA
VANGUNU
PAVUVU
RUSSELL ISLANDS
BANIKA

THE SLOT

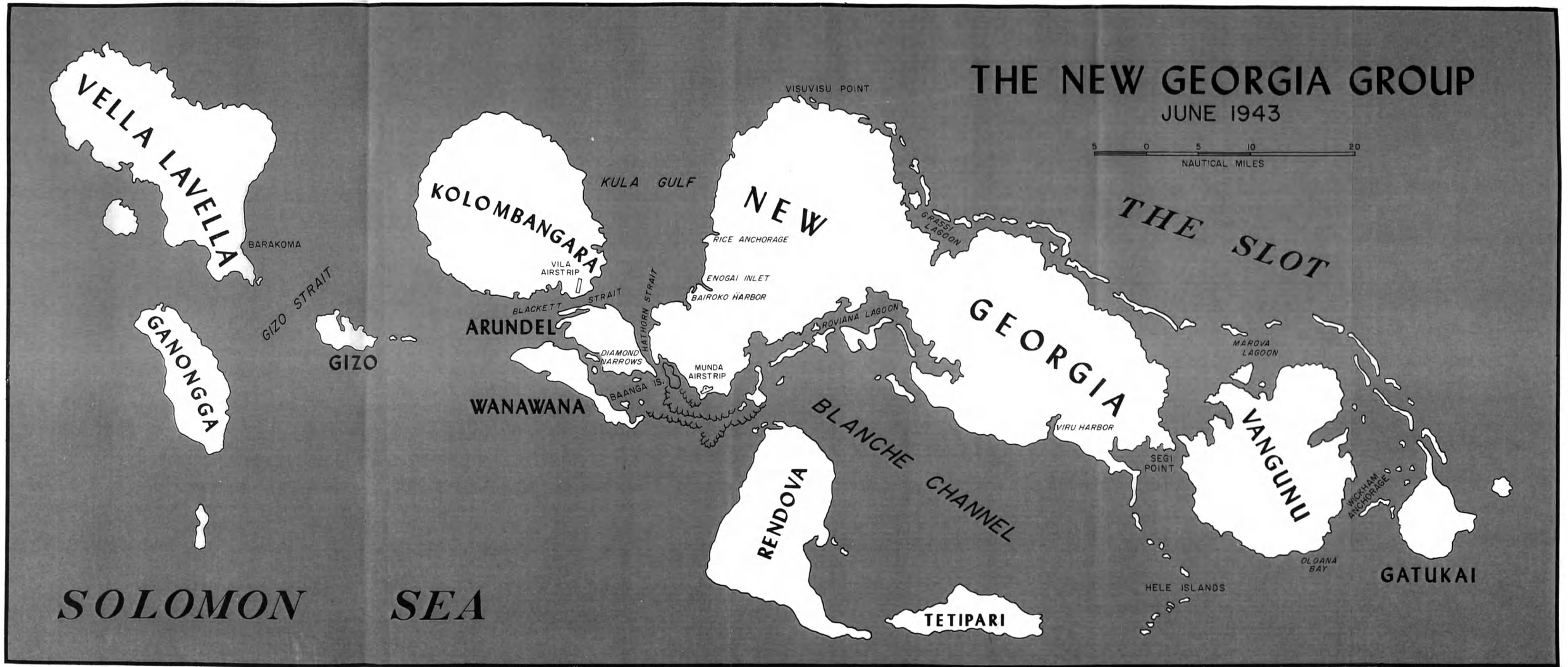
SANTA ISABEL
INDISPENSABLE STRAIT
MALAITA
FLORIDA
SAVO
Tulagi
GUADALCANAL
MARMASIKE
SAN CRISTOBAL
RENNELL

ONTONG JAVA

SANTA CRUZ
SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS

MAP I

R.F. STIBIL



MAP II

R.F. STIBIL

WESTERN NEW BRITAIN

SHOWING MAJOR RIVERS AND MOUNTAIN RANGES

CONTOUR INTERVAL 1000 FEET

4 3 2 1 0 4 8 12 16 20

MILES

BISMARCK SEA

SOLOMON SEA

SAKAR ISLAND

ROOKE ISLAND

DAMPIER STRAIT

Cape Gloucester

BORGEN BAY

Cape Bushing

Ibaki Point

Cape Merkus

Willaumez Peninsula

LAKE DAKATAUA

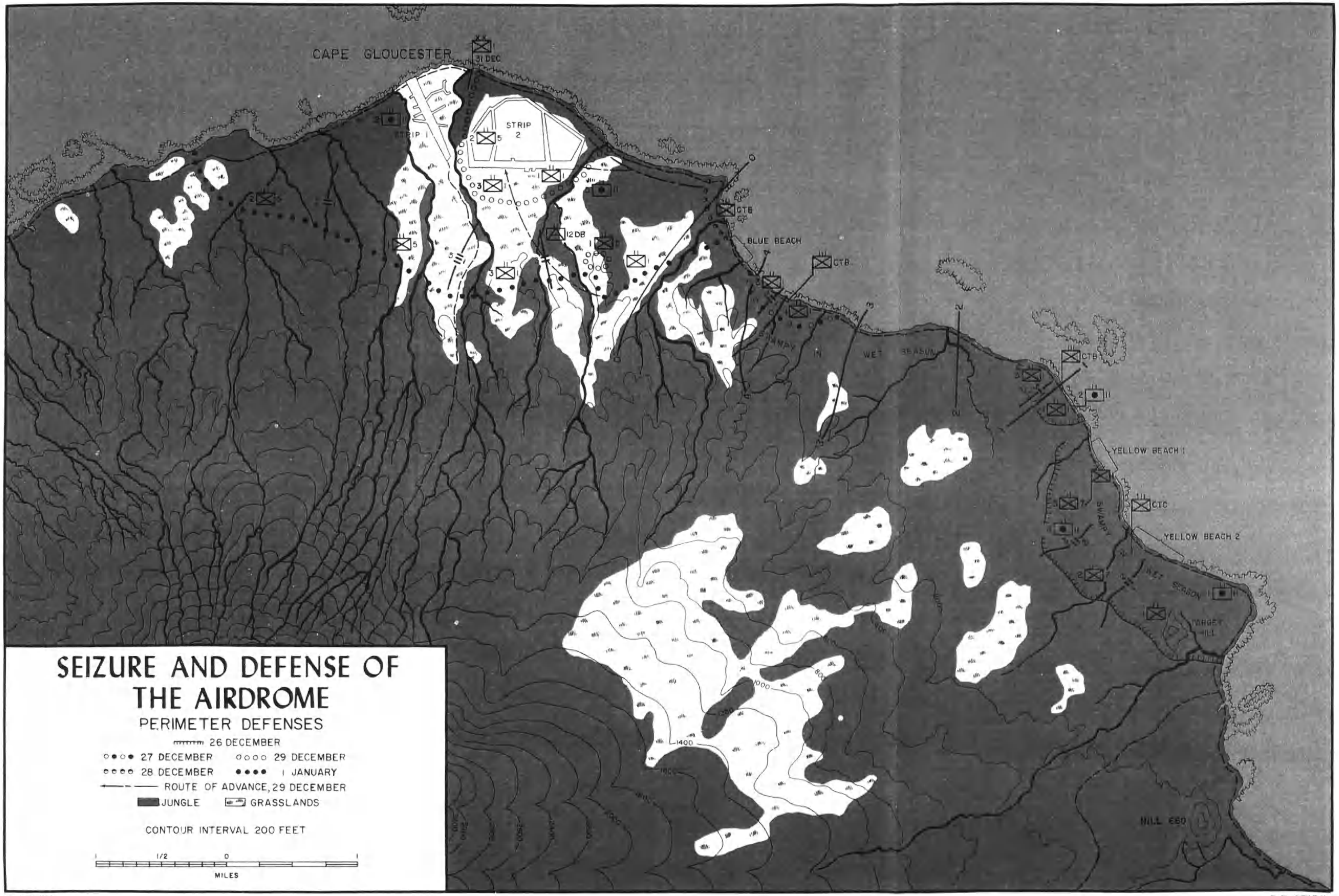
KIMBE BAY

Cape Hoskins

GASMATA ISLAND

MAP III

R.F. STIBIL



MAP IV

R.F. STIBIL

691-360 O - 64 (Inside back cover) No. 3

WATOM

MAKADA

DUKE OF YORK ISLANDS

DUKE OF YORK

ULU

ST. GEORGE'S CHANNEL

Cape Liguan

RABAUL

North Daughter

SIMPSON HARBOR

THE BEEHIVES

Rabalanakaia Crater Lakunai

The Mother 2247

MATUPI HARBOR

Matupi Crater 741

South Daughter 2180

ESCAPE BAY

Praed Point

Vulcan Crater

BLANCHE BAY

Raluana Point

KARAVIA BAY

ATALIKLIKUN BAY

Keravat

Keravat River

Vunakanau

Cape Gazelle

Rapopo

Tobera

Warangoi River

RABAUL AND ITS AIRFIELDS

NOVEMBER 1943

JUNGLE GROWTH

PLANTATIONS

FARMS AND GARDENS

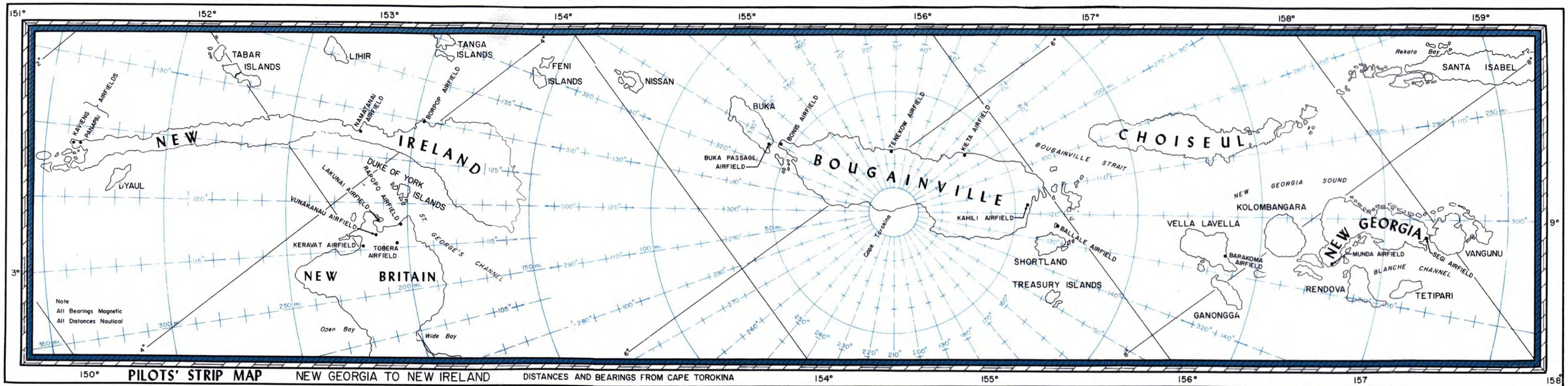
CONTOUR INTERVAL 500 FEET

1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MILES

MAP V

R. F. STIBIL



MAP VI

R.F. STIBIL